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DISSENTING VOICES

Volume 8 (2019)



*The Undergraduate Journal of the
Senior Seminar in Women and
Gender Studies*

*The College at Brockport
State University of New York*

Our Voices

Our voices provide a sense of individualization for the ‘othered’ women who write their ways out of their binds. We speak for all beings, human and non-human, whose voices are muffled under a mask of systemic oppression. This is our call to arms for feminists to reach their full potential by challenging not only patriarchy but capitalism as well. Our dissenting voices want every little girl to know that she is just as worthy of ruling the world as the boy sitting next to her. Our work is a shout, not a whisper; we will not stand anymore for suppressed voices within our society. We showcase how women deserve recognition and equity to be able to care for and embrace our bodies. We are not dependent on our reproductive value. Our rights are not disputable, and our voices are immutable. Our radical thoughts differ from those before us. We are the new wave. We will dismantle patriarchy and pigs will fly.

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Note from the Editor

I am thrilled to introduce volume eight of *Dissenting Voices*, a student engineered e-Journal collaboratively designed, authored, and published by undergraduate Women and Gender Studies majors as an extension of their Women and Gender Studies Senior Seminar at The College at Brockport.

Dissenting Voices grows out of a course learning structure where Women and Gender Studies students reflect upon their undergraduate experience in the discipline, and through engagement, activism, and synthesis of acquired knowledge, establish a theoretical foundation to inform future feminist practices. Course readings comprise students' discipline-specific interests, enabling an intellectual forum in which students dialogue on a women and gender focused topic. This work culminates in a meaningful capstone project grounded in contemporary and emerging feminist scholarship.

Dissenting Voices volume eight showcases eight authors who tackle a wide range of topics salient to Women and Gender Studies. In "Opening Voices", two essays introduce the volume, both exposing the pervasiveness of sex and gender oppressions. Essay one blends fiction with theory in a complex reading of reproductive justice. Essay two examines ways gender bias operates in electoral politics. "More Voices" centers the volume where four authors scrutinize sexism across religion, feminist epistemologies, popular culture, and animal rights. Essays in this section include a timely look at ways dominance of western feminism obscures the contribution of Egyptian female scholars, an analysis of ways Hollywood feminisms complicates women's rights, research interwoven with fiction on the intersections of Ecofeminism and veganism, and an ethnography on questions of sexual equality growing up Jehovah Witness. In "Closing Voices", two essays bookend the volume. Authors in this section capture women's vulnerability as survivors, the first to illness as treated under male medical models, and the second to gender-based violence as realized in the context of family and war-time abuse.

Brave. Creative. Radical. Unapologetic. Imaginative. The writers here are committed to the gender equality causes for which they write, passionate in their resolve to see these

gender equality causes forward. The photo essay at the end of the volume evidences some of this resolve as students enacted many of their topics across the semester. Adding to this, the journal cover portrays an artistic rendition of each author holding a sign that communicates their feminist activism. Their words rise up from their signs to frame the sun. Pause and watch closely for their cues. And listen carefully to their voices. If walking near or around this progressively-minded group, you might hear the adage, “When Pigs Fly,” the “when” in reference to what is seemingly impossible. For the authors here, that impossibility is no longer impossible. Because pigs are flying, offering us hope in the face of despair and belief that we can amend even the most broken systems of inequality. Bridging theory with praxis, *Dissenting Voices* preserves the authenticity of student voice, sanctioning a wide range of ability and talent that students’ senior seminar coursework engenders.

In my early role as Brockport’s Women and Gender Studies Director and faculty developing a new Women and Gender Studies senior capstone course, I had what seemed a pipedream in conceptualizing a student journal. Semesters of dynamic student activism and thought inspired me to imagine a women and gender studies publication that would bring to light undergraduate creative agency realized on the cusp of feminist knowledge. *Dissenting Voices*, as named and populated by its 2012 student founders, and pioneered onward by this 2019 class, is this dream forward.

Barbara LeSavoy, PhD

Chair and Associate Professor, Women and Gender Studies

Executive Editor, *Dissenting Voices*

Dissenting Voices

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The Abortion Fight: Neither Worn nor Won

I. Bleed

Yesterday, she had thirty-nine dollars and eleven cents in her bank account, babysitting blood money she calls it. Forty bucks to watch an infant scream on a Saturday night. Today, she takes a slow, tired trudge from her high school to the corner store nearest to her house. Its open sign stays lit from dawn to dawn. This and the poorly painted board introducing ‘Al’s Market’ has become reliable to her. On all major holidays, and even after the petty robbery left the front window boarded up, she could count on Al’s being open. In her youth, she would come here to steal candy cigarettes, pretending to smoke them with her friends before crunching them to powder between her molars.

She walks straight toward the back corner, grabs the three dollar off-brand maxi pads from the white, secluded shelf. She checks out with her arms folded across her breasts, tapping her foot disinterestedly as the skinny-faced man rings her out. They do know each other, but only in the way you know your local drugstore cashier; and so his smile to her is strained. The shade of her feminine hygiene is looming over them and he looks everywhere but into her eyes.

The pads come to three dollars and twenty-seven cents. The tax is almost the tipping point for her, but she pays anyway.

“Thank you,” she says.

The young man shoots a “Have a nice day,” while counting her dollars with determination.

When she arrives home, she goes to her room and opens the package, unwraps one of the 24 neatly arranged, yellow plastic squares. She strips the wrapper slowly and theatrically loud as if the sound of the peeling could be a reminder to her body. It is 11 days past due. She sticks one pad under her pillowcase for good luck.

She unwraps two more sanitary pads, places a bony knee on each, using them as a cushion to pray to whatever celestial object is willing to listen. ‘Please, please, please,’ is her holy, whispered mantra. She uses another as a tissue, to wipe the tears of a weary fornicator. She thinks about how tears of a weary fornicator could be a comedic expression in a different circumstance. Right now, nothing seems particularly funny.

Her mother is not yet home from work, so she spends her time trying to bargain with the possible embryo. She acts as if she has an extremist’s understanding of prenatal development; as if she believes the fetus has the cognitive function to interpret or to reason, to understand its existence at this moment would be a formidable one. Her fear makes her irrational, and so she pleads for the fetus to come back later or

stay dormant or just evaporate like it is water and her uterus is a hot summer day.

All of this is directed at the long, dirty mirror that is propped against her bedroom wall. Ironically, her reflection is sitting in a child’s pose, body hunching over bended knees. She has always had the face of a child herself, one that seems stuck in a soft pallid of innocence despite her growing experience. Although she is only sixteen, it has already been years since she has painted her face and scrunched it up in an elaborate fashion of stoicism, beautifully detached and mature. Today, though, her eyes look desperate, almost comically wide, expressing a youthful disbelief of the universe’s betrayals. She has also always been short. She has always had to look up and over things, the way children strain to see over a candy counter. The aisles and aisles of musty thrift store jeans always flooding over her stout legs, so that she has to roll them, three or four times, up to her ankle.

Her mirror is lined with aging stickers, peeling at their corners. She has collected the stickers throughout the years, sticking each to the glassy surface with purpose. There is one of a bunny holding a lollipop, some from her favorite clothing brands. The one

sticking out to her now rests in the bottom corner. It reads: 'Find joy in the journey.' The idyllic, pink calligraphy seems to mock her from a more optimistic time. The mirror also has smudges where her makeup has hit against it. There are dust spots acquired from all the forgotten cleanings and sporadic fingerprints, from where she has leaned against it, touched parts of her reflection in discovery.

The stickers and prints and smudges distort her appearance and she squints to make herself out. She combs the bangs out of her face with little hope for making them stay where she wills them to. She thinks about the algebra test she has on Monday, the boy she passes in the hall, who in some way might be growing in her now, about the robotic baby she failed in her Family and Consumer class, the way its mechanical wails tapered out after falling harshly from her backpack. She puts her forehead to the ground and cringes with the vision of holding a wailing child for eighteen years, longer than she's even been alive herself.

Her mother cooks like it is a nasty chore. Slamming pots and violently scrubbing dishes along the way. Sweating so angrily that sometimes her perfume seeps into the food, pasta with sauce and mushrooms and a hint of

musky, imitation Dior. She sits at the table in silence while her mother cooks. One of the table legs are loose so that the entire thing leans oblong. She has thirty-five dollars and eighty-four cents in her bank account. Thirty-five dollars can buy you one large package of diapers, two weeks' worth of baby food, or one-tenth of an abortion. She rocks the table leg back and forth to a slow rhythm of 'how, how, how?'

Her mother notices the repetition of the table clanking against the cheap linoleum. "Are you anxious?" she scrutinizes, "Why are you anxious?" The skillet is still in her hand when she comes closer to examine her daughter, "Are you sick?"

"There are many tests tomorrow Momma," is all she can reply, forcing her gaze to her mother's, almost seeing the skillet walk into her face if her mother knew the truth.

"Study hard, my girl." Her mother nods her head, sharp and approving, turning back to wrestle their dinner; the daughter bites down so hard on the skin surrounding her fingernail, the nailbed runs red, hyper aware that it is not the right kind of bleeding.

Nauseous and spitting into the oval porcelain, she recalls the boy spitting nervously at his shoes in the courtyard, as if he could have sloshed out the bad

news she was feeding to him on the school's benches. She felt then, looking over at the catastrophist expression on his face that she, herself could have been his mother; he had seemed that young, that distraught. 'Don't worry,' she cajoled, 'I will bleed.' And the boy visibly relaxed, placing the heavy weight of his forehead on her shoulder.

But she has not bled. She has not bled for so, so many days and now she is gagging over the toilet. She is hoping the fetus could ride up on her vomit like a wave, crash down into the bowl and off to sea, but nothing comes. She begins to yell, a chanting protest of "get out, get out, get out!" It echoes around the rim and out into the hallway. Her mother opens the door. Slowly then fast enough that the door gives a quick shriek itself. She wraps her arms around her screaming daughter, who heaves into the basin and finally there is release.

II. The Story

This story was created the second week my period was late; it was a work of panic really, an expression of the fear and entrapment I felt with the prospect of losing control of my body. At that point, I was twenty years old, working on my undergraduate degree and below the poverty line. I was also sexually active with shoddy contraceptive practices, a

cruel culmination of my religious upbringing, my vague high school health curriculum, and my convoluted 'all-natural' philosophy. Perhaps my pregnancy scare could be attributed to the lack of agency and decisiveness I was taught to hold over my body. In accordance with the all too common narrative: society was too shy to educate me sexually, but not too shy to shame the young people like myself, who deal with the repercussions of that poor education.

At this turbulent time, like my narrator, I had little more than \$39.81 in my account. I was alone. I twisted a pregnancy test around my fingers, clutched the pointed end into my palm, and stuffed it in the back of my underwear drawer. I remember googling the closest Planned Parenthood, in egotistical disbelief: I was driven, I was school-oriented, I was usually so smart about things; how could I have been so stupid about this?

While my narrator is not me, she embodies the conflict and tension I faced in this time. I chose to fictionalize my character because I consider myself a fiction writer. In their book *Reproductive Justice* (2017), Ross and Solinger state, "Storytelling is a core aspect of reproductive justice because attending to someone else's story invites us to shift

the lens” (p.57). I want my character’s description to be loose, to be subjective to the reader and therefore open to interpretation. Her race or ethnicity is vague. Her state, country, province unknown. All we know is that she is young, unprepared, and ill equipped for new life. Her purpose is to allow readers to embody a kind of ‘pregnancy panic’ that is often overlooked in the politics of reproductive rights. In an issue revolving around the biological anatomy of the person, their own feelings, needs, and experiences are often not weighed in the arguments. I hope, through my character, readers can reconnect to the humanity of fear and bridge a better understanding that abortion is not a gleeful murder but a necessity for survival and medical agency.

III. Identity Politics of Reproductive Care

Personally, I was lucky. I was not pregnant. I bled a few days later and it was a celebration as much as it was an awakening. I told my mother I was going on birth control. I made an appointment with the gynecologist, and I got the pill fully covered by my insurance. But I recognize my personal story is one of privilege, a privilege that may not be afforded to my character. I am a cisgender, white woman. I have the

means to health care, the transportation to receive that health care. If I had been pregnant, I lived in a state where abortion is not restricted, covered for people of my income status, and 20 minutes away.

The United States likes to claim it is the most socially advanced, however basic reproductive health care continues to be a luxury for some instead of a right for all. In the case of trans and non-binary people, obtaining health care can be a gendered, challenging task. Jerkins (2016) relays, “Trans exclusion is all the more egregious when considering that the needs of trans people so often go unmet in a health care system that can be oblivious to their existence” (para.4). Knowledge about trans patients is only offered as electives in medical schools, meaning that medical providers can graduate without ever correctly learning how to treat all identities of patient. This adds another barrier for a trans or non-binary person looking to receive an abortion. Not only do they have to deal with the obstacles of the regulations in reproductive rights, they also have to deal with the gendered ignorance of their health care providers. Due to these circumstances many trans and non-binary folks deny services in fear of discrimination, making a safe abortion impossible (Jerkins, 2016).

Reproductive rights also are racially discriminatory. Many pro-life clinics attack Black and Hispanic people for getting abortions, saying they are allowing abortion clinics to commit a kind of genocide on what would be colored children. However, these organizations leave out the fact that women of color receive abortions two to three times more than white women do (Mansbach & Von Hagel, 2018, para. 4). Partly because of the other health injustices racial minorities face, their rates of unplanned pregnancy is higher. We still live in a time where many racial and ethnic groups live in poverty-dense areas. This means they have less access to affordable contraception and sex health centers.

Due to socio-economic conditions and the lack of resources, it makes sense that more Black and Hispanic people would rely on abortions because they cannot support a child financially (Mansbach & Von Hagel, 2018). The fact that Black and Hispanic people rely more on abortions is an injustice in itself. All areas of lower socio-economic populations are at a higher risk for unplanned pregnancy because of the lack of resources and sex education available to them. It is not that poor people are deciding to have more abortions; insufficient education leads to

“problem pregnancies,” forcing those faced with poverty to seek out abortion more frequently (Furedi, 2016, p. 58). With these racist and classist issues, Black and Hispanic people face another layer of discrimination, both in their scarce health care and the racial guilt pro-life organizations place on them in an attempt to dissuade individuals from abortion (Mansbach & Von Hagel, 2018).

I creatively chose to leave the main character of my story vague to encompass a large breadth of experience. However, it is a reality that the layers of barriers between people and the health care they need are sexist, racist, and classist. The privileges that some identities have over others makes reproductive rights wholly unequitable in our society. In order to dissolve these barriers and ensure reproductive rights to everyone, it is necessary to offer care without restrictions based on cultural or economic factors.

IV. The Financial Straits

Class status is another identity-based restriction of accessing abortion. With the financial component of the abortion procedure, choice sadly becomes an act of fiction for the majority of those dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. For people who face an infeasible

situation, many find themselves without the resources to terminate a pregnancy safely. “After Roe, privacy, liberty, equality—and reproductive rights—the goals of second wave feminism, remained conditional, dependent upon someone’s access to money and other resources” (Ross & Solinger, 2017, p. 122). There is a stark difference between writing a legal right to abortion and making that right an actuality. People in poverty do not have the means to proper reproductive care. The Roe v. Wade legislation is not enough to ensure safe abortions for everyone. There are also the variables of health care and transporting yourself to an abortion clinic, which can be spread out for hundreds of miles in the rural parts of the U.S., even bypassing into other states (Guttmacher Institute, 2014).

While Roe legislation allowed people of a higher class to obtain abortions in private, those of lower classes could not afford such a transaction. This is a reality ignored by many of the privileged feminists who saw the legislation as pure liberation, forgetting that until “abortion achieved the status of rights for all” (Ross & Solinger, 2017, p. 122), less privileged people would be coerced into unwanted pregnancies.

Those who cannot afford to get an abortion also cannot afford to have a

baby. Adoption is cited as the main remedy for those who cannot financially or emotionally take care of a child. Persuading someone with unwanted pregnancies to simply give up their child after it is born takes away agency as well as glazes over the economic constraints of gestation. An “... estimate from the International Federation of Health Plans put the average amount insurers paid for a vaginal birth in the US at \$10,808 in 2015” (Glenza, 2018, para. 6). This excludes the additional costs for transportation, proper nutrition, and does not begin to estimate the costs for those who are not covered by insurance or are not legal residents of the United States.

Arguments for adoption also do not take into account that there is no federal paid leave program in the United States. Although their jobs are secured for 12 weeks with The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, not all parents are guaranteed paid leave for delivery and recovery time (Goodman, 2018). For the financially disadvantaged— some who already have multiple children to care for and who are living from paycheck to paycheck— this is a financially devastating prospect.

V. Desire and Power

I spoke once to a young woman who was pro-life. She claimed that as soon as you engage in sex you are making a conscious choice to potentially have a child. But this is false. There are people in abusive situations, who have become impregnated through assault, who would now have to suffer through a traumatic delivery. All of this information I shared with blunt urgency, but there is one piece I left out, that didn't come to me until later, but which might be the most overlooked pro-choice argument: feminine desire.

The statistical arguments show factual evidence that humans are financially and emotionally burdened by an unexpected pregnancy. But why do we need this research to justify abortions? Why is it so taboo to say that a person could be allowed to want pleasure without wanting to commit to a lifetime of care to another human being? It is sexist to think of pregnancy as a kind of penance for being sexually active and to expect tremendous sacrifice from the pregnant individual because of their sexual decisions (Lowe, 2016). However, this is the mentality when reproductive health barriers are constructed. Abortion restrictions are another way to regulate subjugated bodies, another way to

separate us from our desires and coax us into a reluctant, passive sexuality identity.

Like many things in our society, ignoring the realities of why someone may choose to terminate pregnancies is a privilege. As Michelle Goldberg (2009) states: "What's at stake are not lifestyles but lives" (p. 223). When people correlate pregnancy as a punishment for unprotected sex, they are demonizing a lifestyle in which desire is a natural component. While this is unjust in itself, they are also ignoring the risks to livelihood that pregnancy causes, both medically, economically, and psychologically. I see abortion as a right regardless of circumstance; taking away someone's autonomy to their body is stripping them of their power and there has already been too long a history of doing so. If we are ever to achieve parity, we must first be given full access to our own body. Forcing anyone into parenthood is an entrapment of their spirit, a violation of their independence, a step backwards for the equity of our humanity.

VI. The Reality and a Call to Arms

In 2019 the United States has reached a precipice. Our rights hang off the edge of a dangerous cliff, under the storm cloud of a racist, misogynistic, ignorantly

privileged government. You may think that abortion rights are a topic worn and won by the feminists of the past, of the 60s and 70s. However, just last year, our newest supreme court judge, Kavanaugh “infamously ruled against an undocumented teenager in a detention facility who had petitioned for the right to access an abortion” (Arnold, 2018, para.4). The government is choosing to create legislation that prevents its citizens from accessing the health care they deserve, creating barriers that target the vulnerable and keep them so. There are five U.S. states, (Missouri, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Mississippi) who only have one Planned Parenthood within their borders (Guttmacher Institute, 2014, 2018). This means those looking to get an abortion have to travel increasingly far distances to do so, elevating the already stressful and expensive procedure and making it outright impossible for some.

Those in positions of power are still policing what we do with our bodies, despite what is considered constitutional. We do not have the luxury to forget that Kavanaugh would be the deciding vote during a Roe v. Wade overturn, or that abortion is not readily available for every person who needs it. We must realize the rights fought for in the past are once again at

stake and that honestly, they have never been fully secured.

At the end of our conversation, the self-identified pro-life student admitted to me she had not considered all the points I brought up. She continued to say that she personally couldn’t shake that life is beautiful and must be protected. And I agree with her, life is something beautiful, but it is also something to be lived with autonomy. Sarah Weddington (2013), the primary lawyer who argued for Roe v. Wade, states in her memoir, “to say that life is present at the conception is to give recognition to the potential rather than the actual” (p.71). It is a great injustice to ignore the actualities of a person’s life on an abstract commitment to new life.

As a *Dallas Morning News* editorial in 1970 said: “... the controversy over abortion really boils down to a single question: which comes first, the woman or the egg?” (Weddington, 2013, p.77). In other words, the choice is whether to respect the autonomy and quality of life of the individual who needs an abortion, or to subjugate them into a forced reproduction cycle that continues inequity and poverty because we believe cells carry priority over a fully developed human being.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have chosen to keep my narrator nameless because I want her to represent all of the people, young or old, who have become passive in their own bodies and all of those who are inflicted with reproductive expectations they cannot or do not want to carry. It seems to be the fate of all people with uteruses in our society to find barriers to their reproductive health, despite the fact that we all deserve bodily autonomy.

But what does happen next for our narrator who is devastated by and unprepared for the possibility of pregnancy?

Perhaps she will keep the child, raise the child, swallow her dread of motherhood and assume the role that is expected of her as an impregnated young woman. Of course, it will alter her education, her life path; the commitment is large but also rewarding as she holds her child to her chest, watches them grow with the seasons.

She could also have the child and then put them up for adoption. Give the miracle of life to a family who is looking for it, prepared for it. A couple who cannot or chooses not to have a traditional birth, a same-sex couple, a single parent wishing to begin their own family. She would cry as she holds the

swaddled child close, and then passes them to their new family, knowing they can give the child opportunities out of her own reach.

However, with each of these two choices there is something lost: our narrator's health and happiness. In those nine months carrying new life she is carted back and forth to the hospital, missing class to care for the fetus. She has to quit her job, putting more economic strain on her mother. She starts to fall behind, she fails her algebra class, she misses her junior prom, quits her honor society. She is too tired, too consumed in gestation to live out an entire year of her fleeting youth. And if she keeps the child, college is distanced or doubly as difficult to work through. The reality is she could very well crumble under the weight of a disadvantaged motherhood.

However, what if we gave her a legitimate, destigmatized third choice? Not the shoddy and shamed structures of abortions we have today, but a safe, thorough, and accessible option. She could walk into one of the plentiful clinics, probably past pro-life protestors—that would be hard, yes—but once she got through the clean, government funded, de-gendered clinic doors she would be taken care of. She wouldn't have to watch her body swell,

her hormones fluctuate, while studying for her end of year exams. She wouldn't have to miss prom or run out of study hall to throw up in the bathroom stall. She wouldn't have to change the entirety of her life trajectory, modify her dreams, or fall in the cycle of poverty to support a child she did not wish to bear. Instead of punishing young people, specifically those with uteruses, for acting on natural human desire, instead of forcing pregnancy on oftentimes marginalized bodies, we could set up a competent health care structure that allows people to make autonomous decisions and gives them access to the health care that correlates with their needs.

In an ideal world, it would not matter what my character chooses, whether she chooses to carry the fetus to term and become a mother, whether she chooses adoption, or whether she acts soon enough to have a legal abortion. In an ideal world, she would get the right of

choice and the government would support her decision as well as offer proper care. But this is not an ideal world, and reproductive health is not as free as our legislators would have us believe. This paper has shown that the barriers between people and their reproductive care are racist, sexist, and classist, and that although we have *Roe v. Wade*, we are a long way from progressive and available reproductive care.

I hope with stories like the one I have shared, we can learn to think deeper than the easier arguments, confronting our ingrained societal pressures and recognizing the perspectives of varying privileges. Until we can create the idea that reproductive health is a necessary right, we will continue to be subjugated by the different needs of our bodies and continue to be at the mercy of the systems and legislation that restricts our care.

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Treatment of Female Politicians and Impact on Voter Perception in the U.S.

“If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough.”

(Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa's
First Woman President*, 2009)

This essay explores the treatment of female politicians in the United States government and the impact of negative treatment on potential candidates as well as voters' perception of said candidates. Readers may obtain a better understanding of the stereotypes, double standards, and biases that are projected upon female politicians in the U.S. This work is based on a literature review of peer-reviewed journal entries, research-based books, and credible news sources.

Trouble at Home

In a study of 193 nations, the United States currently ranks 75th on the list for percentage of women in national governments (Catalyst, 2019, Global section). The 74 preceding nations are from Africa, South America, the Middle East, all across Europe, and elsewhere. This begs the question, why is such a developed nation like the United States so far down in the rankings? What factors come into play in our country that prevent women from reaching parity in our national government? Despite strides like the Year of

the Woman in 1992 and the historic midterms we recently experienced, women still only control just short of 25 percent of congressional seats (Catalyst, 2019, Percentage of Women in the 116th United States Congress). I believe that the public mistreatment of female candidates and politicians discourages women from running for office and entering politics.

Imagine you're a stay-at-home mom with two kids, contemplating re-entering the work force. You finally get an interview for that perfect job you've been hoping for, and when you sit down for the interview, you find that they're asking quite a lot of personal questions.

How many kids do you have?

Who will take care of them if you start working?

Are you planning on having more kids?

According to Susan Heathfield (2018), questions like this are illegal to ask in job interviews. But do you think that stops interviewers across the country from asking them? Or asking less-direct versions of them? Meanwhile, the single man they interviewed before you was asked about his ambition and previous experience.

Imagine this scenario, but on the largest stage possible: a presidential election. This is what we, as a nation, witnessed in the 2016 presidential

election. When Hillary Clinton announced she was going to be a grandma, the ground shook, and critics everywhere wondered, how can she be a grandma **and** a president?! No one ever asked Mitt Romney during his previous run if his eighteen grandchildren would be a distraction. Despite the upward trend in women's representation in our government, female politicians still face significant obstacles in the form of stereotypes, double standards, and biased media coverage. The unfair treatment of women in U.S. politics negatively affects the perception of female candidates, as well as the willingness of women to run for office in the first place.

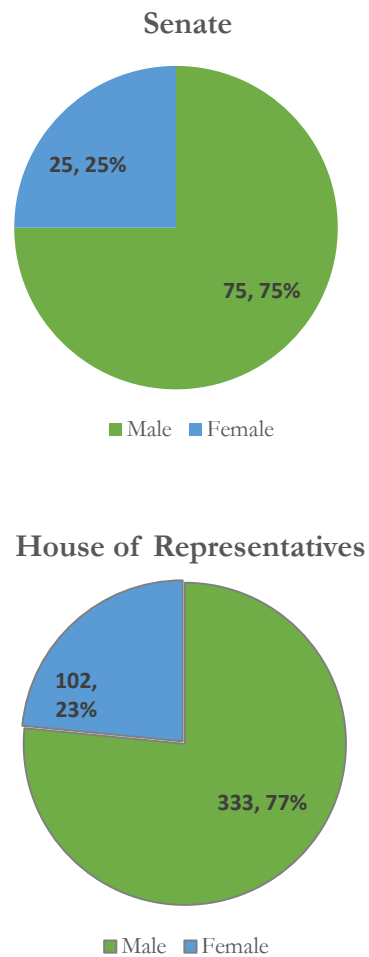
As we explore the treatment of women who choose to enter the political sphere in the U.S., I draw from my experiences as a woman studying Political Science, International Studies, and Women and Gender Studies at a university. I interpret studies proving the existence of bias against female politicians, explore clear examples of media bias, and observe the impact that female candidates can have on voters. Several articles and books by well-known political and feminist scholars including Jennifer Lawless (2016) and Cynthia Enloe (2017) are central to my argument. Through the use of these examples, I

suggest there is a systematic bias against women in government in the United States, and I conclude by pointing out that despite it all, the best is certainly yet to come. This is observable through the silver linings of the 2016 elections, the 2018 midterms, and the emerging field of presidential candidates for the 2020 election.

As a result of the previously mentioned 2018 midterms, there are currently 25 women in the Senate and 102 women in the House of Representatives, out of the 100 and 435 total seats, respectively. This adds up to 25 percent in the Senate, and 23.4 percent in the House (Catalyst, 2019, Percentage of Women in the 116th United States Congress). The numbers are crucial, because as one of the most developed nations in the world, there is no reason for us to be so lacking in basic gender equality in our government. Our population is more than one-half female, yet our government hasn't even gotten close to touching that. Why not? The charts in Figure 1 show (in blue) the portion of our government that is female. I believe it is of the utmost importance to get to the bottom of **why** our government looks like this when our population looks far more balanced. It is not representative, and it is not equal. If

Figure 1

Percentage by Gender in U.S. Government



Data from Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University (2019).

we treated female politicians with the same respect and neutrality as we treat men, politics would be a more equal and proactive entity.

There are a few main factors to consider when discussing the mistreatment of female politicians: lack of encouragement, stereotypes, and double standards and media coverage. What exactly is it that is inhibiting women from running and/or wanting to be politically involved? Every time a woman is ignored, spoken over, criticized for her physical appearance, or sexualized – with no consequences for whomever treated her that way – we set a precedent as to how we treat women who aspire to enter politics in the United States.

EncourageMENT

Susan J. Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu (2013), in their research-based *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures*, explore the implications of gender on the pathway to state legislatures and other political offices. Much of their research focused on the relevancy of encouragement to male vs. female campaigns and candidacies. Because of our historically patriarchal government, one can imagine there might be disparities between the ease of a man's decision to run, and the complexity of a woman's. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) focus on the fact that "Politics traditionally has been and is still a masculinized domain. In turn,

women more often seek support and encouragement before they enter what is far from gender-neutral territory" (p. 61). The authors quote 2001 research from Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell, concluding that men, more than women, were far more likely to be what they called "self-starters," or people who decide solely by themselves to run for legislature. Women, however, were more likely to decide to run after a suggestion from someone else, and were also more likely to report deciding to run due to a mix of encouragement and personal desire (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). But, what are the reasons for the hesitancy to run without encouragement? Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) cite our government as a reason, explaining:

Because of the masculine nature of mainstream politics and women's history of marginalization in the electoral arena, one might well expect women to be less likely than men to view elective office holding as an appropriate career choice or even a realistic aspiration (p. 48).

This, according to Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013), leads directly to women requiring more encouragement than men to run. The patriarchal history of our government and the precedent of our majority-male congress/executive is a major intimidation factor when

women are deciding whether or not to run. Later in the book Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) mention that throughout our nation's history, "women have been excluded from and marginalized in the realm of electoral politics," and that female politicians today "are sometimes met with skepticism on the part of voters, the media, and political parties, creating higher hurdles for women to surmount" (p. 124). This becomes relevant here because we can understand that the mistreatment and the hurdles create the hesitancy to run that we observe in American women. This hesitancy creates the need for encouragement and external support.

Aside from hesitancy to run due to the potential hurdles and mistreatment, there is one other crucial element that results in a need for encouragement: qualifications. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) quote Lawless and Fox (2005) in saying that "women potential candidates are less likely than men to view themselves as qualified for holding public office" (p. 48). There is an observable disparity between male and female feelings of adequacy. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) also point out that female candidates for office are frequently more experienced than male candidates, which raises the question of

whether or not that excess experience is necessary, or a symptom of something else. Despite the excess experience, women still frequently feel inadequate compared to their male counterparts. The authors then posit that, "It may be that women acquire more experience in order to bolster their confidence and feel sufficiently qualified while men more often feel qualified without a great deal of experience" (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, p. 35). They also sought opinions from female legislators about why women felt compelled to gain more experience than men, one of whom said that perhaps women have more experience in order to "feel solid about their credentials before they put themselves out there," while another said that it was "an act of self protection" (p. 35). Lastly, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) argue that it may not only be an issue of women not being confident about their experience, but about men being overconfident in their mediocre levels of experience. The overall result is an increase in women feeling hesitant to run because our society continues to uplift and support under-qualified men while devaluing overqualified women. This theory was put to the ultimate test in the 2016 presidential election when Hillary Clinton, possibly the most qualified

woman in the United States, lost the presidency to what I would call an extraordinarily underqualified man. Regardless of the circumstances, across the board Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) conclude that female legislators “are more likely to have received encouragement from parties and organizations” (p. 125). Whether their own personal desire to enact change played a part or not, they likely needed the extra push because they know just how female politicians are treated in the United States.

SterHEotypes

“Politics is a highly masculinized space, and women are still viewed as intruders whose presence disrupts the traditional order” (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, p. 47). As intruders, women are faced with stereotyping and character defamation on a daily basis when running for office or trying to enter the political realm. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) point out that past social-psychological research has found “that men are viewed as more agentic (e.g., assertive, ambitious, confident, and competitive), while women are viewed as more communal (e.g., nurturant, sensitive to the needs of others, helpful, and supportive)” (p. 45). These views perpetuate the stereotypes that hold

female politicians back in the United States. They are seen as weak, emotional, and soft, while men are the strong and ambitious leaders that we believe are capable of leading. In her book, *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*, Kathleen Dolan (2014) uses her background in research to examine the impact of gender stereotypes in U.S. elections. Dolan (2014) introduces prime examples of gender stereotyping very early on in her book:

In 2010, Kelly Ayotte, the attorney general of New Hampshire and a candidate for an open U.S. Senate seat, had to respond to concerns that being elected to the Senate would leave her with little time to be a good mother to her two young children. In running for governor of her state that same year, Oklahoma Lt. Governor Jari Askins was asked whether, as a single, childless woman, she had enough life experience to understand the concerns of the average Oklahoma family (p. 2).

She continues with more, but the juxtaposition of just these two examples illustrates two oxymoronic biases: first, that a woman with a family cannot be an effective politician, and second, that a woman without a family cannot be an effective politician. Many would call this a lose-lose situation. Women are also commonly referred to as overly

emotional candidates who do not “possess the reason or dispassion to adequately provide political leadership” (Dolan, 2014, p.61). Stereotypes surrounding familial obligations and emotionality are frequently observed stereotypes, with physical appearance also making headlines once in a while. More substantively, Dolan (2014) points out the issue-based stereotypes that are often placed upon women, referring to the assumption that they are “more interested in, and more effective in dealing with, issues such as child care, poverty, education, health care, women’s issues, and the environment” (p. 20), while men are accredited strength in economics, military, and agriculture, to name a few. Women across the country watch female candidates suffer sexist stereotyping and criticism every day. Would you feel confident in running for office after observing all of that?

Alongside the stereotypical biases placed upon female candidates, because they are women, they are frequently sexualized. Caroline Heldman and Lisa Wade (2011) published an article about the sexual objectification of female candidates in the United States, analyzed through the lens of Sarah Palin’s experience running for Vice President. They reference research from Heflick and Goldenberg (2011) that links the

sexualization of female candidates to negative perceptions of said candidates, and importantly, that, focus on “Palin’s appearance ‘led people to perceive Palin as less competent, warm and moral’” (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2010, p. 156, as cited in Heldman & Wade, 2011). Public sexualization of female candidates is never well-meaning, and it happens far too frequently for us to allow it to continue. Heldman and Wade (2011) reference the sexualization of Hillary Clinton, at times focused on the way her laugh sounds or on her cleavage, while 14 percent of the media coverage of Sarah Palin throughout her election focused on her physical appearance, from “VPILF” (Vice President I’d like to fuck), to Caribou Barbie. They conclude that the stagnation in women’s representation in Congress directly correlates with the modernization of the internet and access to the media’s sexual objectification of female candidates (Heldman & Wade, 2011). The bias is further exemplified in Kelly Dittmar’s (2016) article for the American Political Science Association, where she quotes the rapper T.I.:

I just know that women make rash decisions emotionally. They make very permanent, cemented decisions – and then later, it’s kind of like it didn’t happen, or they didn’t mean for it to happen. And

I sure would hate to just set off a nuke. [Other world leaders won't be able to negotiate] foreign policy; the world ain't ready yet. I think you might be able to [get] the Loch Ness Monster elected before you could [get a woman elected] (p. 808).

This is a sentiment used frequently by misogynists that do not want to see women in office. Jeb Lund tried to discredit Hillary Clinton's campaign progress by calling her shrill and whiny, and that she was frequently angry or nagging. Donald Trump ridiculed Carly Fiorina, saying that her voice caused people to develop headaches (Dittmar, 2016, p. 808). No matter what your policy stances are, what you look like, how old or young you are, if you are a woman in politics, misogyny comes with the territory in the United States, but it doesn't have to be this way. Despite the fact that Dittmar references research proving media attention to women's appearance has a negative impact on voter perceptions of their leadership qualifications, Carly Fiorina had this to say:

The point is, whether a man thinks you're homely or a man thinks you're beautiful, it's not a topic of conversation when a woman is trying to do a job – whether it's president of the United States or secretary or anything else (McAfee & Westfall, 2015, para. 2).

That just about covers it.

Double Standards and Media CovHERage

Alongside the stereotypes and sexism placed upon women in U.S. politics, we constantly see double standards that are far more forgiving towards our male counterparts. Double standards on a small scale are influencing the way the public interprets the emotions of a candidate. On a much larger scale, they are shaping the stories that the media show to voters that in turn, impact their voting choices. Dittmar (2016) used Hillary Clinton's cool and collected behavior in her Benghazi hearing in 2015 as an example of a woman having to remain calm through what many would consider a highly tense situation. This becomes relevant when Dittmar continues on to point out that experimental research has found that in debate situations, "men tend to gain influence as they become angry, while angry women tend to lose influence" (Dittmar, 2016, p. 808). This is a clear example of different standards men and women are held to in our government, and it is all based off of that age-old assumption that women are far too emotional for politics. To look at the topic from another angle, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) cite experience as

another area in which there is a double standard. When working under the assumption that women need more experience than men to enter the political sphere, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) posit that,

An alternative explanation for the finding that women have more political experience is that there may be a double standard in which more is expected of women candidates. Women may need more experience than men in order to be viewed as equally qualified (p. 36).

They quote female legislators they spoke to as part of their research. These legislators frequently saw the experience disparity between genders. One legislator told Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013), “When women come on the scene, they have to prove themselves whereas men are given the presumption of competence until they disprove it” (p. 36). The authors quote three women who each echoed the sentiment that women have to work harder than an inexperienced man to be as respected as he is, solely because of our gender (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Women have to cater to the patriarchal system that our government is currently functioning under. From the way we express (or choose not to express) our emotion, to the lengths we will go to in order to convince ourselves and others

that we are qualified enough for our jobs, there is a completely different, and far more lax, set of rules for men.

The culmination of double standards, in this context, appears in the way women are treated in the media. In a research project based around coverage of female candidates in Senate and Gubernatorial races, authors Johanna Dunaway, Regina G. Lawrence, Melody Rose, and Christopher R. Weber (2013) find that female candidates are far more likely to garner trait-based coverage in the media while male candidates are more consistently covered based on their issue positions. While some notable candidates like Hillary Clinton did not suffer from a lack of coverage in any area, differences based on gender nonetheless exist, specifically an overemphasis on women’s personal traits and a lack of coverage on their issue stances (Dunaway et al., 2013). Dunaway et al. (2013) note that their “findings underscore an important dynamic at play in American political campaigns.... Races with a female candidate lead to news that is more focused on the personal traits and characteristics of the candidates,” while all-male contests garnered more issue coverage (p. 722). Echoing the conclusions of this project, Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless (2016) in

Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era, explain the double standards: “compared to male candidates, female candidates are treated differently – and often worse – in the press and by the public,” (p. 16). These portrayals of female candidates not only align with, but also actively reinforce the public perception of female politicians by voters. The negative perception of female politicians by voters is an apparently everlasting relic of the patriarchy that our society has been formed and conditioned under. Further, Hayes and Lawless (2016) point out that women have to present themselves more strategically to the world. Due to the relatively equal competitiveness and resource supply of male and female candidates, “there are few reasons for journalists to treat equally qualified male and female candidates differently,” (p. 20) yet, they continue to do just that.

Through statistical analysis and simple observation, it is clear to see that the norm favors male candidates, and that women are held to a far different standard from their appearance to their experience. When it comes down to it, Hayes and Lawless (2016) remind us yet again that women are consistently more likely to be described using traditionally feminine traits like compassion and

loyalty while masculine traits like leadership and competence are attributed to the men. This sexist coverage creates challenges for female candidates. Hayes and Lawless (2016) say that because women receive higher amounts of trait coverage and lower amounts of issue coverage when compared to men, voters are less likely to see said women as effective politicians. It is difficult to comprehend the effect that media coverage has on voter perceptions of female politicians, but with today’s media and news coverage being so controversial and polarized, it is surely no small impact.

Experience, emotion, presentation. Three of many realms in which society has wholly different expectations for men and women in politics. Three realms in which women truly prove not only sufficient, but also exceptional, time after time, regardless of the ways in which they are portrayed.

Patriarch-SHE and the Future

Society today is exposed to sexism and misogyny against female politicians through the news and social media in a more pervasive way than ever. Under our current administration, fighting the patriarchy seems to be a common theme amongst those who are resisting the precedents being set by the President.

Given the current climate, however, we are still frequently met with “but things are **so** much better than they used to be!” Sure, but the perpetuation of this idea is a part of the problem. Cynthia Enloe’s (2017), *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy*, is self-explanatory and nothing but on-the-money for our current situation. She tells us:

Patriarchy is as current as Brexit, Donald Trump, and nationalist political parties. It is as *an courant* as Twitter, hedge funds, and weaponized drones. Patriarchy is not old-fashioned; it is as hip as football millionaires and Silicon Valley start-ups. The fact that patriarchy is a term so many people shy away from using is one of the things that enables it to survive (Enloe, 2017, p. 15).

This country was founded by men. Granted, many of them had a brilliant woman working behind the scenes (I’m looking at you, Abigail Adams), but it nonetheless was founded on their principles, and thus, the United States Government and its patriarchal foundations were born. We are nearing 250 years into nationhood, and Enloe (2017) could not have said it better. Patriarchy is as modern as Twitter and has evolved with society. Enloe (2017) echoes reminders of double standards in her text, saying, “Patriarchy’s fans in the

political sphere, meanwhile, have not been able to prevent more women from running...but they have held them to standards of parenting and appearance that no male candidate has had to meet” (p. 162). She also emphasizes the fact that patriarchal values admire those masculine leadership characteristics in men, with the same admiration for women who “devote themselves first and foremost to mothering,” (p. 18). Pretty reminiscent of the gendered media coverage of politicians, no? My central point for this long descent into the patriarchy is this: patriarchy is the material from which the fateful glass ceiling is made.

Given this, we nevertheless have to remain optimistic about the future. If nothing else, draw your optimism from the November 2018 midterms. Kayla Epstein and Eugene Scott (2018) write for *The Washington Post* that the 2018 midterms “ushered in one of the most diverse groups of politicians in American history, bringing in a new wave of governors, senators and representatives who will break decades-or even centuries-long barriers” (para.1). Among the victors:

- Kyrsten Sinema: the first openly bisexual Senator, *and* Arizona’s first female Senator (Epstein & Scott, 2018, para 4);

- Ayanna Pressley: Massachusetts' first black Congresswoman (para 5);
- Marsha Blackburn: Tennessee's first female Senator (para 6);
- Jahana Hayes: Connecticut's first black Congresswoman(para 8);
- Deb Haaland & Sharice Davids: the first Native American Congresswomen (para 9);
- Rashida Tlaib & Ilhan Omar: the first Muslim Congresswomen(para 11);

And lastly, a personal favorite of mine:

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: the youngest woman ever elected to Congress (para. 12).

I choose to be hopeful. If we ensure that no one remains complacent and we keep putting the work in, I am not sure anyone can hold women back in this government moving forward. Once midterms were over, society immediately began looking towards November 2020. The field is not lacking in women. Kirsten Gillibrand, Liz Warren, Kamala Harris, and additional women have already thrown their hats into the ring, running for the biggest office in the country. I am thrilled to see how the campaigns will develop through the primaries and beyond. Cynthia Enloe (2017) said it best, "Where patriarchal ideas and relationships flourish, there is

the possibility that they can shrivel. For such shrivelings to occur, however, we need to view each of these places with fresh feminist eyes" (p. 76). That is precisely what I intend to do.

Love, ME.

May 18, Year 2033

Dear Me,

*Work went well today. That bill I've been working for since last year finally passed into law. Things are finally starting to slow down since the last election; the whole city has been crazy. If you're reading this in 2019, then I know you know what a crazy election looks like already. But I have to make an important distinction here. I mean crazy in a **good** way, not crazy in a 2016-election way. It was even better than 2028, and no one thought that was possible.*

I'm writing because I know things have been tough. Your college years taught you a lot, but they also showed you that things really aren't as equal as society wants you to think they are. You found that niche, that spark that really sets your soul on fire, and it all started with you asking yourself, why are there so few women in our government? From there, the snowball of research and discovery grew larger than ever imaginable. You'd never believe everything you're going to be a part of in the future, simply because of that one question. Graduation is just the beginning. Don't be nervous about moving to D.C., you know that it's the right decision,

and the city is waiting for you to come make your mark.

*The year 2019 left you with a Congress that was just shy of 25 percent women. Well, you're 35 years old now, and Congress is now 44 percent women. We haven't quite doubled it, but damn are we close. Close enough to be proud. Not close enough to be complacent. The ERA finally passed in 2026, and because I know you're wondering, Roe v. Wade is alive and well, and Planned Parenthood is still fully funded across the country. Comprehensive parental leave laws are federal now, our previously dismal maternal mortality rates have improved, and women have continued to fight for what we need and resist those who want to speak over us. Change has been made. And you might be surprised to hear, you've been there in the thick of it all. The work has been hard, and at times disheartening, but you have climbed the ranks like you wanted to, not necessarily exactly **how** you wanted to. Where you are now is because of everywhere you've been along the way.*

Inching closer to parity in government, stepping more aggressively into the realm of politics, and proving our knowledge and skill over and over again in those "masculine" areas like military, foreign policy, and national security; these are the things that have created a more equitable air in politics. The glass ceiling has been shattered, and you're reaching for the next level. You've spent all four years of your undergraduate education wondering if it will all be worth it in the end, and if change will ever truly be effected. You're wondering when you'll see a woman sitting at the desk in the Oval Office. It is closer than you think, and it is so, so worth it. Take it from me... because you know what never gets old? Despite all the steps backwards and disheartening vetoes? Despite all the doubters, all the stereotypes, and all the good, long, cries along the way?

The joy in your heart when someone calls you "Senator Bygall."

Love, Me

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Why are there No Great, Female, and Egyptian Scholars?

“TO ALL EGYPTIANS”

(Mona Prince, *Revolution is My Name*, 2012)

This essay is a study on the topics that Egyptian women shine their lights on. I write this because I identify as an Egyptian woman, and I never hear these women’s names during my scholarship. I hope readers receive a sense of individualism for the “othered” women who write their ways out of their binds. My topic is crucial because Egyptian women are bound to either sexism in their own culture and racism in others, which begs my theory of a third space.

I believe it was second grade when I first noticed. I mentioned to one of my classmates that I don’t see my dad’s side of the family that much because they live in Egypt, so it’s quite difficult to manage regular visits.

“That’s impossible.” I believe her name was Sarah, but I can’t really remember. “If your family was from Egypt, then they’d all be dead.”

That was a new one.

Of course, this took me completely by surprise, and I was dying to hear the rest of her thoughts. She was wrong, obviously, because my family was most certainly *not* dead. I had even just seen them a few months prior. I couldn’t possibly understand why she’d think that my family was dead. If you would, consider the thought process of a seven-year-old: death is a fairly new concept, and someone’s just told you, with the utmost confidence

and bravado, that *half* of your entire family, whom you've seen, hugged, and loved, never existed. What the hell was she thinking?

"They're not dead." I was baffled.

"They'd have to be." She wasn't quitting on this conspiracy theory. "If your family is Egyptian, then that means they're mummies now." There it was. I understood at that point what she had meant. Of course, a young child in rural Connecticut in 2005 isn't likely to have seen a lot of Egyptian or Arab people with the exception of child-friendly cartoons of Pharos or mummies. DreamWorks's *The Prince of Egypt* or Stephen Sommers' *The Mummy* could very likely be her only exposure to people from the Middle East. To her, to Sarah, Egypt existed exclusively in history and was a faint memory that frequents her media when plot devices call for it. I insisted that she was wrong, which invited the most powerful words uttered by elementary students to this very day: "Prove it." I couldn't blame her, but, as is the way of young children, I simply had to prove her wrong... in front of the whole class, naturally. The next day, I brought with me a scrapbook of my latest trip to Egypt and asked my teacher if I could show it to the class. Mr. Rogers –believe it or not, that was his name– agreed, and thus began my

impromptu show and tell. That wasn't the last time he allowed me to present my heritage to the class: about halfway through that school year, I moved to Egypt with my family with no immediate plans of returning to the United States, and he hosted an Egypt-themed going away party for me. Of course, it was Ancient Egypt, but I never thought much of that.

I never really got away from that mindset, though: Egypt is camels and ancient deserts. After moving there for a few years, I returned to the States as "The New Kid from Egypt". The novelty of my tan skin and bilingual tongue didn't last very long in my new, rural school in Northern New York, but the questions sure did.

"You're from Egypt? Did you go to school on a camel?"

"You're from Egypt? Did you live in a pyramid?"

"You're from Egypt? Is your dad a taxi driver?"

I can't get too frustrated with middle school students, but it follows me until this day.

"How do you say 'fuck' in Egyptian?"

"Your English is really good."

"Aren't men allowed to hit their wives in Islam?"

It never ended, but it begs an urgent question as to why this keeps happening

to me. Clearly, there's a much larger issue at hand: my classmates did not know about Egypt. No one knew about the brilliance –or, more importantly, the normalcy- that exists beyond the Pyramids and the Pharos and the Sphinx. It exists beyond the politics of war and oil. Just like any other country, just like the United States, there's complexity.

Driving Theorists

When entering Middle Eastern discourse, the scholar whose name I hear almost exclusively is that of Edward Said, a Palestinian American scholar who dedicated the vast majority of his scholarship to studying colonialist relationships between the East and West. Rarely ever hearing any other names merits the question: where are the great, Middle Eastern scholars in the world, and are any of them women? Borrowing language from Linda Nochlin's (1971) essay titled, "Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists," my research moves beyond the initial inquiry in order to address why there hasn't been any attention paid to great, female, Egyptian scholars. Thus, contrary to common, Western perceptions of Arab women, there is a large community of Arab female scholars who own their authority to

discuss topics such as politics, gender, sexuality, identity, and, as plenty of readers are surely expecting, the veil. Specifically, I analyze Egyptian female scholars and their writing in order to examine how women who experience it first-hand observe subjects such as the aforementioned veil.

Gender politics within a marginalized ethnic group is tricky to assess. Mona Eltahawy (2015) explains there isn't a side that truly supports the independent actions of Egyptian women. On the one hand, in the Middle East there are traditional gender roles that hinder women's abilities; however, in the West there is a booming community of people who are too eager to point out the gender inequality as justification for Islamophobia and racism against the Middle East. I argue that these two hindrances keep Egyptian female scholarship in the dark even though it is just as crucial to feminist theory and research as Western scholarship. Egyptian female scholarship offers a perspective that further globalizes and unites feminist discourse. Ultimately, I argue that the opposing hindrances stem from masculine and male-dominated discourse that shuns the doubly other. A 'third space' that overcomes the strict dichotomy between the Middle East and West is vital for a feminist wave to stick.

The backbone of my argument stems from three major sources: Mona Eltahawy's (2015) *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution*, Leila Ahmed's (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam*, and Chandra Mohanty's (2003) *Feminism without Borders*. Using media research, these scholars help frame my question while auxiliary essays provide evidence for the answer. A centralized focus of the marginalized identities of the scholars who write these works assists in proving my theory that a 'third space' is the missing piece for which Eltahawy (2015), Ahmed (1992), and Mohanty (2003) are searching. Ultimately, my research takes the shape of a literary review providing evidence for my theory, based on the experiences that these women share and elaborate. I conduct an analysis showing patriarchal foundation is the root of why there are no great, female, Egyptian scholars dominating feminist discourse in the West. Thus, my methods present themselves as such.

Mona Eltahawy's book, published in 2015, is the most recent source I have. She writes on the concept of the veil in Egypt through historical findings, literary reviews, and personal experience. She establishes the idea that

While I am acutely aware of Islamophobes and xenophobic political right-wingers who are all too glad to hear about how badly Muslim men treat their women, I'm also acutely aware that there's a right wing among Muslim men that does propagate misogyny. We must confront both, not ally ourselves with one in order to fight the other (Eltahawy, 2015, p. 30).

Clearly, Eltahawy (2015) confronts one of the greatest reasons that Egyptian scholars are unheard of in the West, and it's because of the "Islamophobes and xenophobic political right-wingers" (p. 30) as well as the Muslim men in Arab cultures who develop their own conservative right wing within the Egyptian political climate. Throughout her work, Eltahawy, references bold Egyptian women across centuries of Egyptian history who have made great strides in Egypt's feminism. She overtly explores the two hindrances that Arab women face, supporting my question as to why Western perceptions are so valued and how that exact value assists in adhering Egyptian women to their space in the domestic sphere.

Subtitled "*The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*," Leila Ahmed's (1992) book breaks down the topic of gender into three parts as it flows through Middle Eastern history: "The Pre-Islamic Middle East," "Founding

Discourses,” and “New Discourses” (Ahmed, 1992). What Ahmed (1992) does with *Women and Gender in Islam* is provide historical context for a lively, 21st century debate that prevails today and follows a strict timeline while doing so. For my research, I’m primarily interested in the final chapters of Ahmed’s (1992) book that fall under the final section titled, “New Discourses,” specifically, the chapter, “The Discourse of the Veil”. This chapter touches on one of the most popular subjects concerning women in the Middle East. Ahmed’s (1992) chapter, following her contextual style of format, offers a historical background for the conversation that surrounds a woman wearing the veil in either a Muslim or non-Muslim country. Ahmed (1992) asserts that “... it is Western discourse that in the first place determined the new meanings of the veil and gave rise to its emergence as a symbol of resistance” (Ahmed, 1992 p. 164). This line, as well as her chapter, greatly exposes the gaping disconnect between Western perceptions of Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim women and the reality that the women in these regions experience daily. Moreover, Ahmed’s (1992) book serves as the history against which the rest of my research rests. Ahmed looks at the beginnings of Arab and Middle Eastern

women losing their voice in their region, which ultimately bled westward to form inaccurate ideas.

The third piece that contributes to my research question is Chandra Mohanty’s 2003 research work, *Feminism without Borders*. Within it, she discusses the issue of “colonization” of non-Western topics by Western feminists and the harm that derives from it. Mohanty (2003) predominantly argues that Western feminism asserts and solidifies ideas that Middle Eastern women who veil or become housewives are slaves to their oppressive patriarchy. While Egypt, the Middle East, and a heavy handful of Western countries do, indeed, suffer from a male-dominated society, Mohanty (2003) counters that writing off women in non-Western regions as oppressed and silent actually perpetuates that oppression and silence in the Western sphere. Rather than attempt to learn about the lifestyle of a woman in a Middle Eastern or Arab country as she lives it every day, Western feminism robs itself of a new perspective that will unite and globalize feminism. Mohanty (2003) titles her work based on a single ideal: that feminist discourse and understanding would exist globally. This is a goal similar to my own and is the reason that I establish Mohanty’s (2003) *Feminism without Borders* as the third and

final element of foundation for my question and argument.

“Prove It”

The remainder of my sources provide the evidence that answers my question as to why the West does not see and recognize great, female, Egyptian scholars. A curation of five additional sources, in short, exhibit that there not only is an abundance of Egyptian female scholars, but that they discuss topics far beyond the veil. Through their experiences, each woman showcases her work while simultaneously aiding in my discovery as to why they don't own any wildly public authority over the topics they discuss, such as Egyptian politics or mother/daughter relationships. An anthology titled, *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region* (2009) and a text titled, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (1997), offers a collection that shines a small light on Egyptian women and their scholarship.

The Nawal El Saadawi Reader (1997) is the perfect example of one of my major arguments: Arab women do not just write about the veil, and the veil is not the most burning topic in the Middle East. Nawal El Saadawi (1997), a medical doctor and non-fiction writer, makes it her personal mission to make globally public the everyday discourse

that surrounds the Arab or Middle Eastern woman. In her short text, she covers everything from women's health to orientalism to the Arab woman's imagination. Evidently, just through her choice topics, El Saadawi (1997) attempts to deconstruct the image that Western perceptions force Arab and Middle Eastern women to wear the veil. Part four of her six-part curation of topics features a chapter titled “Women, Religion, and Literature: Bridging the Cultural Gap” (El Saadawi, 1997). Essentially, El Saadawi (1997) argues that ‘bridging the gap’ implies two sides of equal ground “between which there is a gap” (p. 134). Each side should contribute to closing, but she discloses that the language does not correlate to the epistemological space occupied by the East and the West (p. 133). She introduces that, “Islam or Islamic culture has become like a guinea pig in the Western lab, to be examined, dissected, analyzed, and gazed at” (p. 134). This assertion offers the idea that existing in the dichotomy between the East and West is a one-sided othering. Although El Saadawi (1997) intends on relating her theory to the effects that such one-sidedness has on the progression of orientalism, she unintentionally introduces the reason that no Egyptian female scholars are

greatly included in prevalent, feminist discourse. According to El Saadawi, the West's othering of the Middle East is disguised as a two-way disagreement in which the West is equally othered and demeaned in the Middle East. In actuality, the West and its successful media is highly praised and appreciated in Egypt.

More from Nawal El Saadawi (2009) is a piece that's been curated into *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region*. As her title suggests, she discovers a parallel connection between writing, both creative and factual, and liberation from what she describes as the expectations of an Egyptian woman by the world around her. Her writing of her own, personal experiences introduce an idea of 'The Egyptian Dream' as a Middle Eastern parallel to the 'American Dream.' Rather than cherry pies and white fences, though, it's kushari (rice dish) and medical degrees. El Saadawi lives under the name of her father forever, even as she moves from her father's house to her husband's. She is destined to become a doctor or a surgeon (a common occupation for young, Egyptian women) and eventually a mother. While the 'Egyptian Dream' suggests a great deal of confined spaces -- her father's home, her father's name, medical school, her husband's home, the kitchen -- it hardly

differs from the packed SUV and hot oven of the 'American Dream.' Further, El Saadawi (2009) considers the route "preordained for [her] before birth [...] dating back to Pharonic times" (p. 287). In her short, biographical essay, El Saadawi (2009) explains the power that comes from a woman's pen and paper to write through the consuming limits of either 'Dream,' although, rather ironically, her controversial writing lands her in prison. What this piece provides, however, is an Egyptian woman who arguably parallels French feminist theorist, Helene Cixous (1976) and her essay, "The Laugh of Medusa," where she implores her female readers to write themselves to liberation. Thus, El Saadawi (2009) discusses a confirmed, feminist topic --as indirectly supported by theorists who are well-known for their feminism; and she explains through my 'Egyptian Dream' theory why scholars don't hear her voice as loudly as Cixous' (1976).

Alongside Leila Ahmed (1992), Mona Makram-Ebeid (2009), in her flash piece, offers the most empirical data to my collection of sources. As a former member of the Egyptian parliament, Makram-Ebeid (2009) discloses that due to a quota requirement passed in 1980, thirty-five women served in seats of parliament until 1987 when the quota

was abolished. She recalls that only two percent of the parliamentary seats were held by women afterwards. Clearly, Makram-Ebied (2009), in her short and informative essay based on her experience in the Egyptian government, writes to implore female readers to involve themselves in their politics in any way that they can, as well as fight for more female representation in the Arab government all together. I recognize, through reflexivity, that I'm most fascinated with her rhetoric: Makram-Ebied establishes her argument with the opening sentences of her piece by breaking down the importance of including women in politics. She doesn't even mention the Arab world or the Middle East in the first paragraph. She clearly aims to unify all governments that have a severe lack of female representation before she narrows her focus. Makram-Ebeid (2009) showcases an aspect of Egyptian female scholarship that argues against the Muslim/Arab right wingers who remove women from positions of power, the "Islamophobes and xenophobic political right-wingers" (Eltahawy, 2015, p. 30) in the West, and even misguided Western feminism, which asserts that women in such regions are so violently oppressed that they can't even help themselves (Eltahawy, 2015).

Another topic of discourse surrounding Egypt is that of female genital mutilation (FGM). Mona Abousenna (2009) covers exactly that in an exploration of shame and honor, a common theme that occurs when discussing young women in the Mediterranean world. Abousenna addresses the theory of practicing FGM, which stems from the belief that FGM saves a young woman from dishonoring herself and her family with pre-marital sex. Abousenna (2009) bases her piece on the grounds that "the ultimate root of female circumcision [...] lies in the view of the female body as a site of shame" (p. 396), tracing the practice to a more complicated expectation of women in Egypt. This perfectly depicts the incredibly complex and difficult position that Egyptian women inhabit, for how could a woman defend a culture that is so deeply rooted in misogynistic practice? On the other hand, how can a woman be expected to go *against* her culture when the men within it are highly antagonized in popular media and news? The necessity of a 'third space' presents itself greatly in this situation; neither 'side' is technically correct or incorrect, for no history is ever so simple. Unfortunately, women in Egypt still struggle from both sides, and that's where the 'third space' becomes crucial

to the survival and success of Egyptian feminism.

Finally, Mona Nawal Helmi (2009), as a last example, borders on the side of radical. Her piece speaks of the upcoming Mother's Day holiday and how she plans to honor her mother by taking her mother's name. In Egypt, every child's middle name is their father's first name, and their surname is their paternal grandfather's first name. Thus, a young girl wears her fathers' names, and since women in Egypt don't typically change their name after marriage, she wears it forever. Helmi (2009) challenges that custom in her work titled, "From This Day, I Will Carry my Mother's Name". She occupies a majority of her essay with the honorable and admirable actions of the mother figure. However, she first makes a claim that radicalizes her entire work: "Western women [...] are in alliance with their fellow countrymen in a conspiracy to demolish the virtue of Islamic countries and the innocence of obedient Muslim women" (p. 400). I intentionally expose these beginnings to Helmi's (2009) work in an act of reflexivity, for while she addresses Western feminism in a way similar to my own work, she essentially performs the same act of generalization upon it that my work battles. Therefore, when

considering the 'third side,' that Eltahawy (2015) influences, Helmi (2009) clearly doesn't align herself with *it* but with the side of the Arab/Muslim right wing. However, she admittedly provides a glimpse into an aspect of an Egyptian woman's life as she lives out the 'Egyptian Dream.' Thus, in considering how both women in Egypt and in the West identify themselves with the names of the men in their lives, Helmi introduces an entirely new concept that casts the mother figure as the identifier in an effort to centralize women in the Middle East and in the Arab world in a way that doesn't currently take place.

Current Breakthroughs

What so conveniently ties my works together is a timely lecture titled "Empowering Women in the Middle East" by Manar Sabry (2019) that I was fortunate enough to attend. Dr. Sabry, an Egyptian scholar and feminist, discusses education, employment, and politics as it relates to women in the Middle East. She opened her lecture with a poem by Hafez Ibrahim (n.d.) called *Poem for Mothers*. This early 20th century work asserts "a mother is a school" and solidifies an ideal about women and motherhood that Sabry critiques. She exposes numbers:

Egyptian working women make 35 percent less than men, for example (Sabry, 2019). She raises an interesting point about women's rights in the Middle East. I asked her what she finds to be different about the way Western feminism participates in activism as opposed to the Middle East. Essentially, we concluded that Western feminism does not suit the Middle East. I believe this contributes to the wedging dichotomy between the two regions.

Activism has to look different because, while Arab women face similar discrepancies such as a wage gap, there are multiple forces working against Arab women such as traditionally gendered ideals. Protests in the street are not ideal. Over the last eight years, protests against the government are not tolerated. They have taken the form of riots, such as those in Tahrir Square in 2011. These riots unfortunately ended with a number of casualties. Admittedly, riots that have taken place over the last eight years are the protests that gain the greatest amount of global attention. All were geared towards the government instead of feminist issues. As El Saadawi (2009) suggests, liberation through educated means is crucial. Sabry (2019) speaks on the benefits of Arab and Middle Eastern women having access to more education, such as gaining a greater

awareness of women's rights. As she continuously asserts in her lecture, "It's getting better for women, but it's still not enough." The third space is what will make it 'enough,' because it addresses the liberation needed by women from an admittedly oppressive patriarchy as well as paints a clearer picture of Arab women to those in other regions. Generally, 'Women's Rights' means something different in a country like Egypt, which is where the Western misunderstandings originate.

"How Arab?"

In second grade, I don't recall a conversation with Sarah after showing my scrapbook. There was no "I told you so" or other form of bragging. Maybe she fell quiet, maybe I didn't feel the need to prove anything else, or maybe we just forgot about it the next day. What I do recall, however, is how I encountered her mindset in other ways. Rather than, "your family must be dead," of course, it takes the form of more plausible questions. "How Arab?" for example, which implies that I descend from Egypt the same way a large amount of the U.S. population descends from Ireland. Peers who have asked me this question aren't convinced by my appearance and feel the need to know how deep the blood runs in my body. It's

important to note that these peers were never Arab or Middle Eastern-identified themselves. I've had this suspicion of my race further justified with statements like, "you don't look Arab." In actuality, even with my Scottish mother's features, I "look" very Arab, but those asking me likely don't know that. Perhaps they meant that I don't look like Queen Cleopatra—who was Greek, I might add—or that I don't wear a headscarf. Ultimately, these questions and statements stem from the same place as Sarah's bizarre second grade accusation, for they come from people who must not know what Middle Eastern or Arab women look like. There's a stereotype for Arab men in the media: dark skin, lots of curly dark hair, a beard, and probably religious garb. Women, if shown at all, typically wear scarves,

although recent offerings such as Hulu's newest original series, *Ramy*, work to step away from that narrative. It all comes from representation, or a lack thereof.

There isn't one solution that will fix these problems for Arab and Middle Eastern women, or even all non-Western and non-White women. Everyone in that intersection, and every other possible intersection that could likely accompany someone, suffers from the double-edged sword. Proper representation seems to be the best place to start. With plentiful accurate representation, there is less room for misunderstanding of certain cultures. Therefore, there is a much larger likelihood that women in other cultures will have a stronger voice in their own as well as other communities.

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The Pretty Pink Box

“The diversity of voices, issues, approaches, and processes required to make feminism work as an inclusive social movement is precisely the kind of knotty, unruly insurrection that just can't be smoothed into a neat brand.”

(Andi Zeisler, *We were feminists once from riot grrrl to govegirl®: The buying and selling of a political movement*, 2016)

This essay focuses on the consumerization, capitalization, and popularization of feminism within mainstream culture: how it is branded, how it is portrayed, and who it represents. As a young consumer and feminist, I acknowledge that this needs to be addressed for the sole reason that feminism is not a trend or fad that can afford to die out for its goals and strife are far from over- when we water down a political and social movement based on equality into nothing more than a trendy label, we put our needs at risk. It is important to critique and question what is happening around us even if it appears to be “fighting” the good fight.

My final year of high school was when my so-called “feminist awakening” manifested. Of course, I had always been a feminist; I had just never been exposed to the term that would represent the thoughts that followed my life as a young woman in America. Why was I expected to be polite, complicit, pretty, thin, and agreeable to integrate myself successfully into society as appropriately feminine? Why did I have to be constantly aware of what other’s thought of me, especially men? Why, regardless of what I chose to do “when I grew up,” did I have to reserve time to idealize romantic love, be someone’s wife, be a mother? Why was I responsible for whatever happened to me; that, if I were to be raped or sexually assaulted, it would be because of what I wearing or how much I was drinking?

Why was I responsible for my reputation when word got out around my school that my boyfriend and I had sex? Why was I a whore while he remained unscathed and praised? I molded myself into this small person, someone who stayed quiet, small, wore clothing that wouldn't draw attention, didn't ask questions.

Finally, at the age of seventeen, I decided to take the Women's Issues class that my school offered for upperclassmen. One of our first assignments was to ask five individuals what their definition of feminism was. Of course, I had asked my mother and some of my fellow female-identified classmates, whose definitions may have been tamed but nonetheless, provided me with the "womanly" assurance I felt I needed to reach the assignment's full potential. I remember that, on the morning the assignment was due I still needed two definitions, so I asked two boys in my prior class. "Feminism is for bitter, ugly women. It is a pointless movement. Women are already equal," was the response I received from one while the other nodded along. This sparked a bickering match between the two of us (which I am very good at). This would be one of the many times throughout my young adult life that I was confronted with the harsh reality of

the outlandish presumptions many Americans have created in regard to what feminism entails: that it is solely a movement for women who hate men, and that all women have achieved equity. This was one of the many times I would have to justify my "radical" but not so radical beliefs predominantly to heterosexual, cis-gender men to assure them that feminism isn't a threat but a movement that is necessary to make the world a better place for all identities.

Today, four years later, I am a senior in college. Since then we have had a presidential election that has caused severe division, uproar, and resistance, particularly among women. Since January 2017, cities across the United States have started an annual tradition of the Women's March to combat the non-inclusive and misogynistic agenda our current Presidential Administration perpetuates. We have more women in Congress than we have ever had in America, and Hollywood sparked up the "#TimesUp" and "#MeToo" movements to combat sexual assault and provide women with the space and strength to come forward with their stories and experiences. In fact, over the last several years, feminism has progressively become more and more involved and embedded into popular culture, advertising, and marketing.

Feminism is more accessible and visible than it has ever been in recent times. It can be bought on a T-shirt or tote bag at stores such as Forever21. Feminism is immersed into plots of TV shows on networks such as “Freeform” or “The CW” and is a selling point for every blockbuster film with a strong female lead. Girls I attended high school with, who rolled their eyes at the utterance of feminism, are suddenly posting pictures at local Women’s marches, sharing articles on Facebook such as “Beyoncé is a Feminist! And you can be too!”, throwing away their bras, or sporting feminist necklaces, beanies, backpacks, anything you can think of! Of course, it’s all pink. What’s so bad about the color pink, after all?

While I would love to celebrate the growing support and exposure of the feminist movement, I sit back and question its motives, especially after becoming a Women and Gender Studies major in college. I have learned that feminism is more than freeing the nipple, girl power, fucking whom you want, and reform-based approaches to equality. Labeling yourself as a feminist requires you actually to BE a feminist, and for it to thrive, it has to be intersectional. It has to extend past the surface level, “attractive” or “edgy” talk pieces. Feminism must extend past the

western lens, it must be for trans women, women of color, disabled women, poor women, fat women, and women who experience oppression in severe forms. But *Buzzfeed* articles on feminist celebrities provides no feminist representation when writers focus on the white, privileged, or “shiny pink fluff” feminist identities. One’s feminism can not only be contingent upon the issues they have witnessed from their point of view. It cannot be that simple, because we cannot possibly progress with a mindset that narrow.

Author and activist Andi Zeisler (2016) noticed the recent rise and glamorization of contemporary feminism with the growth of digital media. Zeisler highlights the dangers of marketplace feminism typically sold to us using a pink shell or by celebrities who pride themselves on girl power, dating all the way back to the formation of the Spice Girls. This particular feminism attracts young women and consumers while giving them a false representation of all that feminism entails. It is wrapped up in a **pretty pink box**, all while coinciding with patriarchy and not truly combatting the real sexist issues at hand. Pink Pussy hat feminism, and the image that marketplace feminism strives to enforce on what a feminist should look like, reinforces the

gender binary that we are attempting to dismantle. Zeisler (2016) says: “The question I wanted to put out, if not definitively answer, was this: If everything is feminist—music, movies, strip clubs, energy drinks, underpants—than what does feminism itself become, and what is it for?” (p. 24)

In this paper, I explore what it truly means to be a feminist in 2019. I am interested in whether the effects of contemporary feminism using digital media, popular culture, and celebrity endorsements has propelled or set back a movement that women and activists have so desperately tried to conceptualize and gain approval on since Second Wave feminism’s initial rise in the 1960s.

Women’s Liberation

Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines feminism as “a theory advocating political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” or the “organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests” (Feminism, 2019). These ideologies were championed by women in the United States beginning in 1960, when women propelled a movement that sparked immense social as well as cultural change that would become known as the Women’s Liberation Movement. *The Feminine Mystique* by

Betty Friedan (1963) is widely viewed as the spark of the second wave of feminism, challenging the notion that women are solely fulfilled in roles such as housewives and mothers. This expectation of women sprouts directly from the separation of the public and private sphere that normalizes men holding positions of power (ex. Businessman, politician, etc.) while also being the primary breadwinner in the family, keeping women’s rightful place within the home. Friedan (1963) entertained the notion that women deserved better than an average life with little to no passion. She encouraged women to find meaningful work in the workforce, which would enable husbands and children to become more self-sufficient people, capable of tending to their own needs (Tong & Botts, 2017). Although Friedan’s writing was revolutionary for its time, radical feminists criticized it heavily, focusing solely on a white, middle class, heteronormative woman’s perspective who found traditional expectations of womanhood and motherhood disappointing.

Friedan also underestimates the challenges women do face when or after entering the workforce on top of being a mother and housewife. This perpetuated the unachievable stereotype (that lingers

even today, in 2019) that mothers and wives can “handle it all” while ignoring the structural changes needed to encourage men to contribute to labor within the private sphere (Tong & Botts, 2017, p. 26). Instead of taking measures to deconstruct the toxic ideologies and systems that uphold these ideas of a woman’s role in society, Friedan encourages women to be more “like men”(Tong & Botts, 2017, p. 27) to assimilate into a culture that is laborious and patriarchal. With the development of radical feminism in the 1970s, as well as the development of womanism by bell hooks (2016) (Womanism is to feminism as lavender is to purple), which gave women of color a name to define their oppression not only based on sex but race as well, liberal feminism’s agenda became less appealing. When your movement is exclusive to those who live and look a certain way and strives to work within institutions whose power builds upon the disenfranchisement of minority groups, the movement will only go so far.

Criticisms of liberal feminism are necessary because, in this case, its conception of equality is too “abstract and formal” (Tong & Botts, 2017, p. 46) It is evident that liberal feminism is the foundation on which the movement is founded. Therefore its ideologies are

often recanted and reignited within our current social movements. While modern day feminism has shifted some of its focus for the better to issues such as rape and sexual assault (“Take Back the Night” and “Slutwalk” are yearly marches meant to empower women’s safety and autonomy), as well as reproductive health care and equal opportunity, we still grapple with the issue of being inclusive to all women facing other forms of discrimination and injustice.

Celebrity Feminism: Who Are They?

It may seem refreshing for women and girls to see feminism everywhere, especially those who have claimed feminist ideologies before it hit the mainstream and its messages promoted by their favorite celebrities. But some argue that its pervasiveness is damaging to feminism’s overall goals and underlying message. Zeisler (2016), author of *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*, argues that the growth of celebrities using their platforms to promote surface-level feminism has tarnished its authenticity and continues to oversimplify the political goals and need for deep rooted social change that feminism stands for. Since the 2016 presidential election, it

seems that most (predominantly female-identified) celebrities have taken to their Instagram accounts to speak out against our current administration. This includes (but is not limited to) Emma Watson, who embraced feminism and encouraged women as well as men of the United Nations to take part in its cause for equality globally. Or Jennifer Lawrence who argued for equal pay between herself and her male costars, sparking conversations about equity in Hollywood. Even celebrities such as Kim Kardashian have claimed feminist identities when combatting slut shaming and sexual expression.

The largest and most celebrated claim of feminism was that of Beyoncé Knowles, who famously claimed her feminist identity (after years of beating around the bush) during her 2014 performance at the MTV Video Music Awards (VMA). There she stood before a screen that read “Feminist” while performing her song “Flawless,” which samples excerpts from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2012) “We Should All be Feminists”. Adichie’s excerpts explain and justify the need for gender equality. This image at the VMA acquainted young girls around the world with the concept of feminism “completely free from more than a century of baggage” (Ziesler, 2017,

p.114), and it received mass media attention ranging from positive to severely negative reactions. Among these negative critiques was that of feminist scholar and writer bell hooks (2016) who claimed Beyoncé to be a “terrorist... especially in the terms of her impact on young girls.” (The New School, 2014). bell hooks (2016) critiques Beyoncé’s expression of feminism in how she exploits her already sexualized body (as a black woman). Beyoncé submits herself to conventional beauty standards and the female form to market her “product” (feminism). This suggests that feminism/black woman’s experience can only be a topic of conversation if it presents itself using attractiveness, sexualizing black women’s bodies more than they already have been in popular media.

hooks’ (2016) critique on Beyoncé’s use of her body and sexuality may be warranted in warning against the risk of sexualizing the black female body more than it historically has been. I argue, then what would represent a healthy expression of a black woman’s sexuality? Is it possible to create a middle ground where black women and women of all identities can express their sexuality in a healthy way? It is necessary that we stay away from regressive ideals that second wave feminism promoted in terms of

not giving anyone (men/society) a reason to disrespect you. These regressive ideals perpetuate toxic ideologies that dressing the way we want or hinting at being sexual warrants disrespect or a reason not to be taken seriously. However, where is the ground for women to express their sexual agency absent of sexist critique? Tamara Winfrey Harris (2013), in retort to hooks' (2016) critique, discusses how our interpretations of Beyoncé's feminism and the policing of feminist credibility is a contradiction of the movement itself and perpetuates the culture that tears women apart when they are given platforms to express themselves, especially black women whose femininity and bodies are heavily policed. Jackson (2016), a race and media scholar at Boston's Northeastern University adds:

The idea that Beyoncé being sexy is only her performing for male viewers assumes that embracing sexuality isn't also for women... the criticism also ignores the limited choices available to women in the entertainment industry and the limited ways Beyoncé is allowed to express her sexuality, because of her gender and her race (p.18).

All in all, Beyoncé's expression of feminism is that of a modern one and challenges perceptions on black

women's bodies that should be questioned:

Her engagements remind us that once we proclaim that "the booty don't lie" -- despite the incredible lies told on the black booty -- we can dance in the space of our own truths, reclaim our bodies, assert our beauty, and redefine our sexual selves on our own terms (Hobson, 2018, p 119).

Perhaps then, this embracement and appreciation towards one's sexuality as a woman, particularly a woman of color, allows a threshold for truly embracing the parts of oneself that society has demonized and muffled, because it is about the power of that choice to express oneself that is radical while straying away from the traditional concept that women can't be sexy and also stand for something.

Championing a True Feminist Identity

When observing and commenting on celebrities' expression of feminism, we form a sense of generalizability in recognizing their sphere of influence. It is safe to say that Western feminism's growth in popularity among pop culture influencers, such as musicians and actresses, has made the topic of gender equality accessible to people everywhere, but predominantly young girls. Roxane

Gay (2014) said in her reflection on celebrity feminists,

So long as we continue to stare into the glittery light of the latest celebrity feminist, we avoid looking at the very real inequalities that women throughout the world continue to face... We avoid having conversations about the hard work changing this culture will require (para. 12).

Therefore, we do a disservice to the “average” women living in America when we feature faces of wealthy and attractive women who are shielded by their fame from real-life experiences that are unavoidable for those who do not live within that Hollywood bubble.

While I agree that the progression towards having conversations about feminism and planting its seeds of influence within the minds of young people has had positive effects, I do not believe that celebrities are always the best people to facilitate these conversations. These women are often compromised within their own spaces of privilege, especially in regard to money and resources, while receiving high praise and awarded labels as feminist icons for doing the bare minimum. Feminism is a political movement with political aims that demands recognition in the so-called “real” world where trans-women, women of color, and poor

women are continuously put at a disadvantage. Who is uplifting those voices?

These women (celebrity feminists), similar to the methodology of second wave feminists, work within the tight confines of an ineffective system; therefore, they endorse and invest in a de facto police state (Udorie, 2018). This perpetuates the ideal that it is in fact *possible* to achieve the radical, inevitable change third wave feminism demands while working within oppressive systems. Historically, we know that this does not work. This transformation cannot happen overnight, nor would it be a simple swap. Reform-based approaches to equality rarely signify any deep-rooted social change, but offer a Band-Aid to cover a gunshot wound, so to speak. What is actually required is the transformation of the relationships we have with each other in order to “create new forms of safety and justice in our communities. The work of abolition insists that it is necessary that you *change everything*” (Udorie, 2018, p. 4).

This new form of mainstream feminism has lost the radical vision of “changing everything” and struggles. Feminism is not an explicit platform, but rather an ideology for anyone who has recognized the power imbalances that exist within society. This is a

contributing factor as to why feminism has been co-opted by corporations who use surface-level sentiments of “girl-power” and female empowerment for advertising and brand-making, as well as the mainstream media anointing “clueless celebrities such as Lena Dunham, Taylor Swift, and Amy Schumer as vanguards of righteous, pro-lady politics” (Udorie, 2018, p.5). Modern feminism, as an ideology, has widened its venture so much that it is assumed that gender alone makes one eligible for the label. This version of feminism calls for change while attaching itself to the complicities of coinciding with hierarchies such as racism, transphobia, capitalism, colonialism imperialism, and ableism. Therefore, being a feminist today is immediately associated with binary, shallow, non-radical phrases such as “strong women” (a developed version “of girl power”).

If feminism was contingent upon gender, we would not see the long-standing hesitance towards proclaiming the label, and this label would hold true regardless if she is exploiting workers in other countries in the name of capitalism (predominantly women and children), ignoring the rights of trans-people, or working to keep her neighborhood free from immigrants (Udorie, 2018). This

feminism ignores problems of disenfranchised women while radiating those who hold privilege: the white, cis-gender, heterosexual, able bodied, middle/upper class woman. This also closes us off to potential feminist alliances, not only with each other as women of varying identities, but distracts us from incorporating men and non-binary individuals as well into feminist movements.

So, how can one properly claim a feminist identity in 2019 without feeding into this toxic cycle of hypocrisy? “The personal is political” is a phrase that has been coined within feminism and women and gender studies for decades. The important distinction that can be made to ensure that we are being the best activists and feminists we can be today is to add that just because something doesn’t affect you personally does not mean you shouldn’t take it personally. It should infuriate everyone that the rate of change is so slow in regards to the gender wage gap in the United States. If this change continues at the past fifty years’ pace, “it will take 40 years -- or until 2059 -- for women to finally reach pay parity” (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2019, para. 3). For women of color, the rate of change is even slower: Hispanic women will have to wait until 2224 and Black women

will wait until 2119 for equal pay (Institute for Women's Policy Research, n.d., para. 4). It should infuriate everyone that trans-women's safety and well-being is of the greatest threat, with research showing that transgender women of color in particular are at the highest risk, that "the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia conspire to deprive them of employment, housing, health care, and other necessities, barriers that make them vulnerable" (Human Rights Campaign, 2019, para. 1). These problems should be universal to the cause and goals feminism strives to achieve. We must do better to be allies to those who hold disadvantages different to our own, and uplift those voices rather than drown them out with our own. There is power in claiming a feminist identity, and it should mean so much more than throwing on a t-shirt capitalizing off that identity, especially

when its creation promoted the disenfranchisement of another human. Pink pussy hats are no longer relevant because you do not need to have a vagina, let alone a pink one, to be a woman or a feminist.

Rebecca Walker (1995) wrote:

...it is more important now more than ever to fight to be all of who we are. Rather than allowing ourselves and others to be put into boxes meant to categorize and dismiss, we can use the complexity of our lives to challenge the belief that any person or group is more righteous, more correct, more deserving of life than any other (p. 11).

Feminism's legacy demands that we know and understand ourselves as people. We must recognize the power imbalances and disparities that occur across identity lines and have not one face, but several faces on the front lines, which requires us to activate for change across all identities, not just our own.

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Readying the Rape Rack: Feminism and the Exploitation of Non-Human Reproductive Systems

Dedicated to Lindsay April

“We believe that feminism is a transformative philosophy that embraces the amelioration of life on earth for all life-forms, for all natural entities”

(Carol J. Adams, *The sexual politics of meat: A feminist vegetarian critical theory*, 1990)

It was a foggy morning, the bar level with my eyes keeping me from spying on what was buzzing around me, the stifling heat and smoke from machines, the smell of dust and hay. There was nothing that day but fleeting grief accompanied by the thick storm clouds looming above us that I could see through the cracks in the splintery, wood ceiling.

I knew the routine by heart. When the machines started, we all stood frozen, the concrete floor rumbling below our cold, blistered feet. Our eyes dipped and fell despondent, whispering, “it won’t always be like this” and other sentiments that would once more prove themselves untrue. Sometimes I would even feel guilty for lying to myself; for being what I was and who I was. When the men arrived, we made sure to be compliant. To stand still, upright. It was faster this way. Sometimes, they would slap the top of my head or back as if to say bello. The contact made my skin crawl and the flies around me disperse, only to land on a new part of my rotting pelt, still buzzing the way flies always buzz.

Introduction

In this paper I will discuss the sexual exploitation of non-human bodies, specifically, dairy cows. As a vegan and animal rights activist, I feel compelled to take this opportunity to share and maybe even enlighten fellow social justice advocates on feminist aspects of animal agriculture, an under-researched topic that many overlook and might not even consider relevant to feminist discourse. Drawing on animal rights-based feminist theory, I argue that, in order to fully fight gendered oppression, we must also advocate for those whose voices are not always lifted or comprehensible, but are still subjects to sex-based discrimination and violence. Throughout our lives, we are offered an idealized image of dairy cows where these animals graze on beautiful pastures, have room to sow and play, and are comforted in spacious areas in which to sleep. We are presented with images of a life well lived, but when it comes to the deaths of those same animals, the picture perfect story comes to a grim reality. The animals whose milk we put directly into our mouths are the ones whose lives are most frequently shrugged off by consumers since we are instructed to assume that this is just a part of life.

We teach our children that dairy is a crucial part of any cake recipe, we give students boxed milk with their school lunches, and worst of all, people are socialized to believe that as human beings, we need the milk from another mammal to sustainably survive. For example, “Got Milk?”, a government funded campaign that emerged in the 1990s, used celebrities to glamorize and idealize the consumption of milk to promote the growth of strong bones in children. Today, we know the campaign was nothing but a ploy to increase milk sales (Keon, 2010).

This fallacy is not only ruining our bodies, but it also supports and exemplifies the degrading way in which we treat female bodies and reproductive health. What I hope that readers can gain from this piece is a more mindful attitude towards dairy products and an ability to incorporate non-human bodies into their own feminist perspectives. This idea is something that is scary to learn about at first, since we are taught that consuming milk is a tradition. However, as many of us know, traditions die out after they are exposed to be not only untrue, but also ethically unjust and the real horrors come to center stage after many years of quiet suffering.

Why Feminism?

When it comes to this topic, many may question the dairy industry as a feminist issue. Some will offer the argument that human lives are more important than non-human lives, and that social justice should be more devoted to issues of race, class, and gender. Others will simply not want to see the life of a cow as equal to that of a human being. However, the animal agriculture industry is something that the majority of us mindlessly support from day to day. If we are going to argue fairly for the rights of all beings in a world soured with sex and gender based oppression, then dairy cows deserve to be taken into account when discussing issues of reproductive women's health. If women do not choose to become mothers, they are shamed. If a female cow is incapable of successfully bearing a calf, they are sent away for slaughter. Their reproductive system is useless therefore, they, as a being, are useless. The double standard however, is that human pain is considered to be more valid than the pain of non-human animals. The idea of murdering women once they can no longer bear children is gruesome and disturbing. Why is it acceptable to perform such horrifying acts on bodies

that are different from our own (Adams & Donovan, 1996)?

The outdated stereotype about women being caretakers and most importantly child bearers remains consistent in the dairy industry, especially when we take into account the means through which these animals are exploited. A few brief examples include rape or sexual assault, nonconsensual hormone treatments, and emotional trauma related to pregnancy. Dairy cows are forcibly impregnated, or raped, in order to constantly produce milk for humans to consume. This is not to say that male cows (bulls) do not undergo similar pain and anguish. They struggle, they die, and they cry for help the same ways a dairy cow does. However, it is the biological differentiation that determines their life journey, similar to the way these biological differences will indicate how human beings will be socialized and treated throughout their lifetime (Adams, 1994).

The dairy industry is a host for sex-based discrimination. It is a site where sexual assault and objectification based on biological makeup are highly prevalent but ignored as we choose to neglect non-humans with whom we share a planet. Most of us can agree that in order to be an intersectional feminist, you must see things from points of views

different from your own. Feminist thinker bell hooks (2000) depicts intersectionality as a way to combat oppression by dismissing the idea that there is one single way that women can suffer. This way is biological sex. However, assuming that all power struggles are rooted in the system of sex and gender has become ineffectual. For a brief moment, place the importance of animals' lives as equal to your own, similar to how you might validate and advocate for the struggles of women that you personally do not endure due to privilege of race, gender, class, etc.

Women's Reproductive Health in Peril

Women's reproductive health is one of the most commonly discussed feminist issues in not just Western culture, but worldwide. Education, being limited and sometimes completely absent, is vital for young women living in bodies constantly under scrutiny and pressure to reproduce. I have observed that some individuals and groups with more conservative family values see women who choose not to have children as wasteful or unwomanly, whereas see pregnant women as the epitome of what it means to be a woman: a breeding ground for children to be admired and

praised but never to the extent where the body is exposed or shared with others.

For example, the bodies of women are seen as not only incubators for newborns, but when that newborn is conceived, it's also a prison (Bordo, 1993). Pregnancy, being one of the most emotionally and physically traumatic experiences a female body can or will undergo, is romanticized and fetishized in Western culture through the media. Choosing to have a child is seen as something to glamorize. Extravagant gender-reveal parties, Instagram posts and online communities make pregnancy seem like a walk in the park for new mothers -- the Kardashians, for example. Abortion is still highly stigmatized. Women who regularly take birth control are quietly judged for taking necessary precautions to prevent pregnancy and to aid other reproductive issues. Girls who get their periods earlier than others are immediately subject to shame since the body is now able to carry a child (Bordo, 1993).

Susan Bordo writes about the struggles of individuals who become mothers and the genetic objects they become as a result of the societal conventions of early/pre-parenthood. In her chapter, "Are Mothers Persons", Bordo (1993) elaborates on the lack of autonomy society gives women based on their sex

and biological makeup. This idea translates fluently to the lives of dairy cows, as once they become incubators for conception, their personal experiences no longer matter and their bodies are subject to manipulation and human interference.

The pregnant woman (whose ethical and legal status as a person is not constructed as a question in the abortion debate, and which most people wrongly assume is fully protected legally) is seen as fighting, not for her *personhood*, but ‘only’ for her right to control her reproductive destiny.

The nature of pregnancy is such, however, that to deprive the women of control over her reproductive life -- whether by means of involuntary or coerced sterilization, court-ordered cesarean, or forbidden abortion -- is necessarily also to mount an assault on her personal integrity and autonomy (the essence of personhood in our culture) and to treat her merely as pregnant *res extensa*, material incubator of fetal subjectivity (Bordo, 1993, p. 93-4).

I remember a story about when my cousin started her menstrual cycle at the age of ten. Her father threw a livid fit of rage as soon as she came home from school with a box of sanitary napkins in hand. “*She can get pregnant now...*” my mother recalled, sitting in a room with Diana and playing with paper dolls after school. One girl was bleeding and one

was not, and one girl could now conceive a baby and one could not. Even as children, women have been consistently assessed as incubators for new generations with no acknowledgement of their personal experiences, thoughts, or emotions towards the situation. Girls and women are thus stripped of their personhood.

Dairy cows begin their lives as vessels of reproduction as soon as they are assigned a sex. If they are male, they are slaughtered for veal or sold to cheap meat industries. If female, however, they will begin and end their lives in a figurative cage. They will undergo gestation periods repeatedly throughout their life, until one day they are no longer able to survive a pregnancy and are then killed for meat. As a woman undergoes menopause, the similar way in which a cow does, she suffers the intangible loss of womanhood. She is a dairy cow, wanting her old life back or maybe even some more time with her menstrual cycle. The difference is, human beings are still valued after menopause as people, while a dairy cow is seen as a useless item that takes up space and thus, should be exterminated (Bordo, 1993).

Animals as Sentient Beings

If you have ever owned a pet before, and most of us have, you are well aware of

the fact that animals can feel sensation and are able to portray emotion. Your cat arches their back when you scratch above their tail, or your dog's face makes a sad look when you scold them for chewing on your favorite shoes. Though we cannot verbally communicate with animals, they still converse with us every day. When it comes to farmed animals, that connection is lost. The compassion we feel for animals who exist directly in front of us does not translate to what we eat at the dinner table because consuming animal products is what most of us are taught is right. However, I again would like to argue that, like other traditions, there are things we are taught that we have eventually had to unlearn.

Female non-human bodies are objectified and commoditized within spaces of animal agriculture, with little to no acknowledgement of their ability to feel physical pain or the existence of their nervous systems. In the same way, women are in gendered spaces when it comes to reproductive rights and health. For example, discussions of rape culture in terms of intrusive, sexual violence are often seen to be women's fault, because as females, they should treat their bodies with the utmost respect and modesty. Another example is the stigma attached to abortion and how vilified women who choose to have them are, despite the

emotional and physical pain that accompanies such a big decision. Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation - The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement's* (2009) main framework emphasizes this basic truth: animals, just like human beings, feel. In his first chapter, he discusses the nervous systems of animals and how biologically, we are aware that they exist:

We also know that the nervous systems of other animals are not artificially constructed – as a robot might be artificially constructed -- to mimic the pain behavior of humans. The nervous systems of animals evolved as our own did. In fact, the evolutionary history of human beings and other animals,



JO-ANNE MCARTHUR | WE ANIMALS

Figure 1. Dairy calf taken away from her mother to begin a life of confinement. From “New born calf waits in a wheelbarrow at a dairy farm in Spain,” by K. Orzechowski & Animal Equality, 2010. Copyright 2018 by J. McArthur & We Animals. Reprinted with permission.

especially mammals, did not diverge until the central features of our nervous systems were already in existence (Singer, 2009, p. 5).

The acknowledgment of the non-human nervous system is crucial to recognizing the ethical dilemma of animal cruelty in general. In this paper, I am choosing to focus on the animal cruelty that functions in the dairy industry. The argument, “Well, don’t the cows need to produce milk? It doesn’t hurt them, right?” is becoming more and more invalid as the realities of the treatment of dairy cows is more and more exposed (Singer, 2009). I will discuss this in the section titled “Lactation and Impregnation”.

Singer (2009) contextualizes my argument by holding up the idea of speciesism and the way human beings discriminate on non-human bodies in the same way we are socialized to subordinate marginalized groups. We are simply taught that one life is more or less vital to the wellbeing of our society and on a wider scale, our planet.

This killing and abuse is happening behind closed doors. It’s easy for one to say they love animals and then to enjoy a glass of milk with dinner that was the product of a living, breathing individual’s pain, suffering, and inevitable slaughter. This begs the

question: If you had to visit the factory farm every morning to get your own milk, stare into the irises of sick, bleeding creatures, see their deformed and infected nipples, and walk away knowing very well how your temporary enjoyment affected another female’s body and overall fate, would you still drink it and call yourself a feminist?

Lactation & Impregnation

The same way women’s health has been at stake for years, a dairy cow’s reproductive system has been poked and prodded. There is a myth that all cows produce milk all year round and need frequent milking in order to stay healthy. In fact, dairy cows must be pregnant or new mothers to produce milk (Newkey-Burden, 2017).

The process in big dairy industry is not as simple as depicted in children’s books or TV shows. There are not men and women in straw hats gently squeezing the milk out of a cow’s udders. Instead there are cold and painful machines designed to draw and suck as much milk as possible, which often leave the udders sore and bloody with abscesses of puss and bacteria. There are not little tin buckets underneath the cow’s body to catch her milk; there are large tanks where all of the milk goes to be pasteurized, processed, and sold to

human beings. Singer (2009) references this false image:

The dairy cow, once seen peacefully, even idyllically, roaming the hills, is now a careful monitored, fine-tuned milk machine. The bucolic picture of the dairy cow playing with her calf in the pasture is no part of commercial milk production. Many dairy cows are reared indoors, some kept in individual pens with only enough room to stand up and lie down (p. 34).

It is important to keep in mind that cows are not encouraged to go “explore” their sexuality with bulls in order to engage in sexual reproduction. Dairy cows become pregnant by humans through invasive, nonconsensual means through both vaginal and rectal penetration (Cochrane, 2010). Dairy cows line up in a circle and are chained to a large round post before the impregnation, also known as the “rape rack” (Butler, 2015, p. 40). Most dairy cows are impregnated yearly in order to make lactation constant and to ensure a surplus of calves. A dairy cow’s calf will almost immediately be taken away post birth. Male calves are sold for veal production, while a female calf is not permitted to nurse to make sure all of the milk is going to humans. The calf is fed a fatty and hormone-filled milk substitute in order to gain weight quickly

to be ready for pregnancy as soon as possible (Butler, 2015).

As I stated earlier, it is important to note that human beings are the only mammals in existence to drink the milk from a different mammal. Dairy has been known to have a direct link to obesity, heart disease, and high cholesterol (Butler, 2019). The fat percentage in dairy is meant to sustain the growth of a calf that will one day be 2,000 pounds (Keon, 2010). Humans consuming this milk (widely consisting of puss deposits, blood and fecal matter) are drinking baby cow growth fluid, whether they pour it on their cereal or freeze it into ice cream (Andersen & Kuhn, 2014).



Figure 2. Two male calves being taken to slaughter after being born. A dog watches as they are carried away. From “5 Images That Should Turn any Mother into an Animal-Rights Activist,” by Kinder World, 2018b. In the public domain.

* * * *

It was halfway into the milking when I heard it, a loud whaling that made everyone start to look around. We couldn't turn and see what was going on of course, but we knew the cry well. One of us, far away in another pen separate from those of us in gestation, would lose today. The whaling grew louder and I put my head down in solidarity for her. I knew it was a dark morning and would get much worse as the day progressed. No one really forgets. I know I haven't.

When it was finally done, we sighed in relief that she was out of pain but braced ourselves for what was to come. It was silent, only the sound of the machines roaring away at our cold, lifeless bodies that had grown so used to standing until our limbs were stiff and udders were chafed. I had become so distracted by the happenings that morning that the sore, raw feeling of my skin being pulled ended up in the back of my mind. It was all at once that the sound of a wheelbarrow traced its way through the dust in front of us, leaving a straight line in its path... The sounds of her crying grew louder and suddenly the whole room shook as one of us, and soon more of us would say goodbye. All at once the same man that slapped my back yanked the tubes off of me, leaving a cold and senseless stinging. I had grown dizzy and bereft.

* * * *

Commercial Dairy as Social Subordination

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, eco-feminist writer and activist Carol Adams (1990) argues that basic animal rights violations coincide with issues of social subordination as experienced by humans. Adams (1994) expands on this argument in her second book, *Neither Man nor Beast*, urging the reader to understand the violated animal's experience as a product of racial and gender inequalities.

Adams coined the term "absent referent" (Adams, 1990, p. 13), meaning the disconnect between what is on your plate and what is a living being with a heart, brain, and nervous system. I would argue that this is considered in modern day discussions of feminism, where we only consider the lives of those in front of us, more specifically, white middle-class women in western civilization. The oppression of women who do not share the same culture as us is easy to brush off, especially in commercialized feminist movements. This type of feminism, though many are making efforts to push back on this concept, has become a cisgender and heterosexual white-washed movement that has proven to be toxic to those who need the results of feminism the most.

This same idea is placed on animals, as we favor and glorify some beings while marginalizing others since we do not interact and acknowledge their presence every day, as humans commonly do with animals like dogs or cats.

When we favor dogs over cows, we are ignoring their intellectual differences in the same way society chooses to place men over women. In reality, however, cows have proven to be wiser and more sentient than dogs in numerous cases (Kim, 2017). For example, cows have acute hearing and alert, visceral senses. According to Marino & Allen (2017), cows have amazing visual acuity, having only one blind spot directly behind them, as their eyes are on the sides of their heads (p. 475). Cow's sensory system is also very complex, being able to detect all five senses and more specifically, the ability to detect salt and sour tastes (p. 476). Cows are known to grow deep and loving connections with each other and human beings. Cows have been referred to as "big puppies" (Kinder World, 2018a), since they act bubbly, charming, and playful when in a stable, peaceful, environment free from pain (Marino & Allen, 2017).

Cows are also very sensitive to touch and have mechanoreceptors, thermoreceptors, and nociceptors in the skin and muzzle. They use touch to determine the

appropriateness of certain food items. They are sensitive to pain but, as they are prey animals, may sometimes suppress familiar signs of pain in order to escape notice by predators. Nevertheless, a number of reliable signs of pain and distress have been identified in cows including during manipulations typical to the farming industry, such as de-horning). Interestingly, while cows are often fearful of touch by humans, they are also calmed by some forms of tactile contact such as scratching behind the ears. (Marino & Allen, 2017 p. 476).

When we ignore the promising attributes of cattle and their ability to feel pain and emotions, we are objectifying them as they embody the absent referent (Adams, 1990).

Conclusion

The sexualized abuse of dairy cows directly mirrors the way female repro-



Figure 3. From "My Dog Met a Cow Today," by reddit, 2015. In the public domain.

ductive systems have been and continue to be treated. As feminism moves in waves, so does the unequal treatment of animals. As the third wave erupted and ecofeminism arrived, feminists began to identify more with the oppression of dairy cows and other farm animals. Though I don't explore this specific topic in this paper, supporting the egg industry promotes the same sexist treatment, just in a different way: hens are impregnated and used for their menstrual cycles and slaughtered once no longer useful to capitalist objectives. It's easy to write off animals as being non-sentient and unworthy of rights since as human beings it is difficult to empathize with non-human subjects. However, as this new wave of feminism emerges and we continue to bring hushed voices to the forefront of the discussions we have in classrooms and auditoriums, we must start to acknowledge the voices of all beings rather than constantly contradicting ourselves when we engage in the consumption of dairy.

When exposed to what is going on outside of our peripherals, people begin to make a change for both non-human beings and themselves. As a vegan who is also a feminist, I believe that human beings should not be able to dictate which lives are considered valuable and

which ones are not. Non-dairy alternatives are becoming more and more popular and accessible and are commonly known to be less expensive than dairy milk as the vegan movement flourishes in the United States. The dairy industries panic as the public continues to learn of these injustices hidden from them. While we fight against the sexual abuse of women, why are we still allowing the same treatment to be thrust upon other living bodies when there are other, more sustainable ways to live that do not involve harming millions of female bodies? With simple lifestyle changes that promote reproductive justice towards animals available to many, why are we picking and choosing which pots of capitalism, sexism, and patriarchy to stir, when we could dismantle it all?

* * * *

The wheelbarrow whistled as the cries grew louder again. The baby sat upright, blood and thin goo matting his new fur. I thought for sure he had no idea what was going on, but somehow I found a twinkle of distrust in its eyes as he gazed into mine. Twisting and pushing his body to find an ounce of comfort, or solace, or maybe just a cool side of the transportation to lay. But it was impossible to stay cold that day. It turned out to be one of the hottest days that summer.

*My dear friend's sounds were deafening and I
myself began to cry.*

*I knew how it felt to have the only
accomplishment, the only product of my pain,*

*torn away from me with nothing left to show for
it besides those buzzing flies and the hope that
one day it would all be over...*

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Growing Up a Witness

In this essay, I pose the question: Is there freedom for women in religion? I set out to find if there is the possibility for women to find liberation within a religious institution. In order to find the answer, I look within my own upbringing and the experiences of the women within my family that have the Jehovah's Witness religion in their lives. I found that the institution is inherently patriarchal and poses a danger to women within it. However, women are able to find beliefs that allow fluidity and autonomy once they step outside of the bounds that religion has placed on them.

Early Memories

My earliest memories include waking up before the sun to attend meetings, learning how to put tights on under a long floral dress without creating snags, and whether to wear white or black shoes when the warmth of spring swept through New York State. I remember staring at the hands of the clock while Jehovah's word was spoken, still too young to understand what it meant, drawing doodles in my anticipation, but being required to listen while I shifted with youthful energy in my seat. I held hands with my family before we ate, listening to my grandfather speak for us about what we should be thankful for. I would squint, my eyes partially open, staring at my grandmother in these times of prayer. She was tall to me, with her own ideas, own beliefs. She was who I idolized. As I sat in silence, disobeying with my open eyes, I yearned to understand her and her unwavering faith. Religion has passed through the matriarchal lineage of my family. I have set out to understand the implications of patriarchal creed that has become

an immense part of our lives. Within the stories of the women in my family gained by interviews, I highlight the questions that we must ask ourselves. We all learn things from the people who take care of us, the village that raises us as children. We come into the public world with a platform of understanding built with the values of our caretakers. What does that look like within the bounds of religious practice? As we grow with experience that differs from the generations before us, are we subject to knowledge and change in that as well? Is it knowledge that allows us to disregard the idea of religion, or is it the loss of faith in an unpopular institution? I have seen change within my own family's passing down of beliefs; and I wonder, what are the possibilities of religion? Is there freedom for women in faith?

My Story

In religious practices, like a song that comes on the radio each time you turn it on, I learned to listen, to behave, to retain. When growing up, my grandparents helped raise my siblings and me. With our mom being a single parent pursuing a master's degree alongside holding numerous jobs, our grandparents were able to raise us how they saw fit. This included an upbringing within the Jehovah's Witness religion.

This entailed our understanding of the world being different than our peers in public school. We had differing ideas on holidays such as Christmas, birthdays, Easter, etc., which created a dissonance between us and the people around us. I learned through experiences – experiences of difference. I remember always pushing my grandmother to answer questions that flipped through my mind. When I asked about faith itself, she would say, “You cannot see the wind, but you can see it moves the world around us. You can feel it.” Her answer encompassed me, as I watched the grass bow down and the trees surrender their weight to the flowing air. These exchanges between us remain vivid even as I age. Yet, I still have questions left unanswered.

As I grew older, I stopped attending the meetings of my grandparents' faith. In adulthood, neither my mother nor my siblings or I still practice this religion. I began to understand that aspects of the faith were in conflict with my identity as a woman and as a feminist, although I didn't have the knowledge to understand that just yet. I also could not understand why faith would ask me to liquefy my body in order to place it neatly within the mold set before me. I realized that my heart would be unwilling to complete this request. I knew that until I stepped

from behind the heterosexual curtain that stifled the air around me, I would never be free. I now have the strength to identify as a lesbian. The various aspects of my identity conflict with central tenets of the faith, and hence, the beliefs of those who practice. I grew up knowing that something about my religion did not quite feel right. I knew that religions caused war, and that people were willing to hate in the name of something that they believed in. I only saw the ugliness and the confusion presented in media and in history books. After this realization, I was in a religious limbo, unaware of where I fit, what to believe, and what to reject. I grew pained at the idea that something that coursed through my veins could leave me feeling so alone and alienated. I questioned believing anything at all, an emptiness that made my bones feel cold. I was in a seemingly endless maze. I was lost and afraid. In her sociological article, Sharon Brown (2004) wrote about feeling this phenomenon after a traumatic life experience caused her to look inward at her faith:

A sudden loss of my Christian discipline would naturally elicit feelings of disorientation. I had based everything in my life upon Christian doctrine, so if Christianity was uncertain, then everything else would be also. On top of

this worry about what is true and what is not, I began to wonder what my family might think. My family had always been influential in my spiritual development and spiritual socialization, so it is predictable that their opinion would be important to me (p. 97).

I was experiencing these same feelings even as I began my college career. I was in courses that spoke of numerous religions. I came to notice that many of my peers felt as if they could not identify with a religion either. It seemed to me that somewhere along the way, the people within my generation discarded the idea of faith. Yet, the professor talked on, and we had compelling conversations about the beauty of difference, of believing in something greater, and believing in other people. We were asked again how we saw ourselves, and I still did not know. Impending questions continued to dawn on me: Could I believe in something separate from an institution? Could I believe in something that empowered me, which was free from conflict? Could I possibly pick and choose to create my own ideas of what felt right in my heart? If my identity as a lesbian is at odds with religion, am I banned from my beliefs?

Intensity of Unacceptance

I do not intend to discredit the prerogative people have to hold their own beliefs and be respected in doing so. I solely seek to expose the reality of the passing down of religion, particularly the Jehovah Witness religion, through following the matriarchal lineage within my own family and our experiences. In no way do I intend to belittle this religion or any other religion. I want to highlight certain aspects of this religious institution that I now reject. When looking on the Jehovah Witness website for my research, my heart began to race, making its home within my throat. My face became blood red as my stomach turned inside itself, over and over. The religion I once claimed to be mine proved to be unwilling to reciprocate my intense acceptance and love.

The Jehovah Witness website compares alcoholism to homosexuality:

Some may wonder, 'Would genetics, environment, or traumatic life experiences, such as sexual abuse, justify one's giving in to homosexual desires?' No, they would not. Consider this example: A person may have what some scientists consider to be hereditary tendencies toward alcohol abuse, or he may have been raised in a family where alcohol abuse was commonplace. Certainly, most people would be

empathetic toward a person in such circumstances. All the same, by no means would he be encouraged to continue abusing alcohol or to give up his fight against alcohol abuse just because he may have been born with the tendency or he was raised in such an environment (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2012, p. 24).

This not only assumes a heteronormative worldview, but it compares homosexuality to a disease. This strips the power of identity, highlighting that trauma can be the cause of sexuality. Taking this identity away from those who have been sexually abused places power back into the hands of the abuser, a terribly dangerous perspective to showcase. As a survivor of violence, this explanation sent chills down my spine. My abusers have no right to claim my identity as their doing. It is not morally right for a religious institution to give abusers that power either. Despite feeling the urge to scream until my voice gave out, to let tears stream down my face, and to curl my fingers into fists, I continued my research. On a further page, bisexuality is touched on, "But what if you're really drawn to both sexes? Many would urge you simply to embrace your sexuality and come out as bisexual. However, you should be aware that same-sex attraction

“is often nothing more than a passing phase” (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2010, para. 5).

Although we can acknowledge the fluidity of sexuality, this also presents a problematic ideal that heterosexuality is natural while other sexualities are not. Looking back on the time when I was searching for answers on my own sexuality, I did not turn to the internet. Yet, kids that have grown up with access to the technology that we have now turn to websites for help. They trust that someone out there can help them with their struggles, having the power to advise them in the right direction. The youth that turn to the website of their faith would solely find condemnation. As the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) states, “LGBT* youth are at greater risk for depression, suicide, substance use, and sexual behaviors that can place them at increased risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)” (para. 2). Therefore, isolation is extremely damaging, if not deadly. We have a human responsibility to provide light for those who suffer within the darkness that this world can spread. The terrifying truth is that those who suffer from marginalization can be cloaked in even greater darkness. I remember when I was on the edge of either being swallowed in uncertainty or finding my

way toward the illumination of acceptance. We all have a right to reach that revelation.

A “Girl” Sin

We see that the Jehovah Witness faith has clear boundaries when it comes to understanding, and condemning, sexuality. It is important to gain further knowledge of Jehovah’s Witness beliefs in order to make inferences on the effects of credence within women’s lives. Sociologist Andrew Holden (2002), completed an ethnographic study on the faith, immersing himself within the culture and beliefs. Holden works to break down the complex ideas and offer a public understanding of the religion. One aspect that proves to be passionately taught is the idea that our world has been swallowed by evil. Holden (2002) states that to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the time we live in is:

A culture riddled with deceit, uncertainty, anxiety, sleaze, drug abuse, alcoholism, sexually transmitted diseases and a whole host of other evils caused by inherent flaws in the human condition. It is only when people come to their senses and turn back to God (Jehovah)...or better still when God exacts vengeance on those too crippled by their own depravity to see the error of their ways that the world will really change (Preface X).

When we step back and use a critical lens on our society, we see that indeed, some troubling aspects persist throughout our world, perhaps in our most intimate surroundings, the people whom we love, or even ourselves. However, when we look closer at the language used, aren't some of the words subjective? Are women more likely to be blamed for their "inherent flaws?"

My mother, Rae, is someone who possesses these imperfections in the eyes of the faith. At the age of 18, she was disfellowshipped as a Jehovah Witness due to her unwed pregnancy. The Jehovah Witness Website states:

We do not automatically disfellowship someone who commits a serious sin. If, however, a baptized Witness makes a practice of breaking the Bible's moral code and does not repent, he or she will be shunned or disfellowshipped. The Bible clearly states: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Corinthians 5:13) (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2013, para. 1).

In our interview, Rae spoke about this experience: "The worst time that I was having in my life, you know, as a young person, they disfellowshipped me. When I went for help, so yeah [pause] it had a big impact" (personal communication, 2019). When I asked if she thought she

would have had the same experience as a boy, her response was,

No. [pause] There were first hand cases of things that I saw when I was a teenager there ... they were also like sons of the elders of the church that got away with things and nothing was done or it was swept under the carpet or whatever" (Rae, personal communication, 2019).

In my mom's case, she was held accountable for the "flaws within her human condition" when her male peers were not. This raises the question, is the sin inherently more "serious" if a girl or woman is committing it? My sister, Morgan, responded to the expectations based on gender within religion by acknowledging, "Standards are different for women...the decisions you make as a woman can be reflected against you more than men ...Like mom... That was always something that we knew about and that was definitely hard" (Morgan, personal communication, 2019). When men hold the power to set rules for women, double standards surface. Ritzer and Ryan (2010) explain how this control operates within our culture: "there remains a near total domination of women by men at both the micro level of intimate relationships and the macro level of government, law, and religion" (p. 441).

Women continue to be disadvantaged at the hands of the patriarchal institutions that dominate our lives. Rae highlights and reiterates the validity of danger within this control,

“It’s just balance missing. You know what I mean. All powerful. That religion is like [pause] disfellowships people for divorcing. Like it doesn’t matter what happens. Like if there is cheating or abuse or anything, you can’t get divorced no matter what (personal communication, 2019).

When credence is such an integral part of identity, the threat of being exiled looms over those faced with violence. This is particularly dangerous to women because women are statistically more likely to be in relationships where intimate partner violence (IPV) is present. “About 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner and reported an IPV-related impact during their lifetime” (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, 2018, p. 7). This proves that patriarchal institutions of religion can affect women on a macro level, as well as the most intimate parts of our lives.

I ask, when a person is fleeing from abuse, how would they be treated within

this religion? The Jehovah Witness brochure titled “*Keep Yourselves in God’s Love*” (2014) provides the answer to this question:

Regarding everyone who ‘does not remain in the teaching of the Christ,’ we read: “Do not receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For the one who says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works” (2 John 9-11). We do not have spiritual or social fellowship with disfellowshipped ones. “*The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, page 25, stated: ‘A simple ‘Hello’ to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?’” (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2014, Appendix: How to Treat a Disfellowshipped Person, pg. 207).

A simple hello to someone enduring intimate partner violence could start a lifesaving conversation. You could be the person to provide an out to someone who cannot gain access to one. The New Testament itself states, “You must love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Wouldn’t saving their life constitute as love? If both of these aspects are understood as truth, then this is a contradiction that must be resolved.

Religion: A Part of Family

Our stories show the danger of the discrimination of women within this faith. I ask, why does it continue to be passed down from one generation to the next? I believe that it has been passed down with the intention of love. As human beings, we live for the feeling of love. We find love in everything; in the people we connect with and particularly those we consider family. We sacrifice for the intensity that love offers us and we do anything to give what those we love need from us. Religion is seen as a guide that nourishes our children into people who are inherently good. Sharon Brown (2004) spoke of this:

The religious teaching of the parents is highly influential because as a child, whatever the parents say is usually accepted as truth. This is very important to consider when discussing religious beliefs. If the parents already assume the role of instilling in the child a sense of what is right or wrong, then their influence over the child's internalization of religious doctrine would be guaranteed. If a parent is the source of ultimate truth, then the child will predictably incorporate the values of the parent within him or herself (p. 96).

In talking with my grandmother, it was evident that doing this for children is immensely important, stating, "If you

can instill values from the bible early on, it gives them [children] structure. If they believe that god is interested and caring, they have a higher standard that helps through tough times... It makes them stronger (Claire, personal communication, 2019). Indeed, there is strength in being held accountable as a young person. When faced with decision-making, as all kids are, it is beneficial to believe actions have tangible consequences in the world around them. Rae also touched on religion within familial life, saying, "People that go to church and take their kids. The idea is nice" (Rae, personal communication, 2019). She reminisced on the past, wishing she had been more involved in her children's religious experience.

I realized in Rae's response that the culture in which she grew up has deep roots within the familial structure and in implementing values of togetherness. These values urge us to be part of the institution, perpetuating that it is necessary for our loved ones.

My mother's religious experiences started as early as she could remember. She would go at least three times a week into her teenage years, expressing:

It affected everything. I dedicated my life to that, and then, [pause] I mean I didn't know anything else, it wasn't like it was a choice. When I got older, I started to

resent it, so then the choices I made led me to go in the complete opposite other way, obviously affected everything (Rae, personal communication, 2019).

The strict bounds placed around her in the name of religion constricted her way of life, causing rebellion in search of freedom that she could not feel. Morgan spoke of the same phenomenon:

It made me make different decisions in my life, especially when I was younger trying to form to that religion... I think it limited me and my decisions and how I felt as a person when I was younger... feeling like if I made the wrong decisions, I could be blamed for that and looked down upon because of it (personal communication, 2019).

Although it is common for us to believe this institution is integral to moral development, there are clear negative consequences, such as self-esteem issues, uncertainty, and lack of confidence in identity.

If the implications of strict religion on youth causes pain, how do we raise our children? Although there is power in young people knowing that their decisions have impact, is there a line that can be crossed? Is the installation of religion causing fear instead of guidance? Morgan reflected on her own experience:

Growing up Jehovah Witness put a perspective on things... there are so many things they had in their own religion that would say that you're wrong and I think growing up with that puts a weight on you... the way they see sin... if you do make those decisions... you're wrong and you need to be ashamed of yourself, which is not true. Everybody makes mistakes in life... We're humans (personal communication, 2019).

Although all parents wish to provide the necessary values to their children to help them navigate life, the rigidity of the passing down of religion proves to burden youth. So how do we walk the line between value and fear? Morgan, with children of her own, expresses the difficulty of finding this balance:

I have a hard time... I have my own beliefs but I never want to put that on them... I don't want it inflicted on... [my eldest son] the way that it was with me when I was little.... Any time they ask me about things... they've asked me if there is one god... I explain that everybody has their own beliefs and you can choose for yourself what you want to believe.... That's the best thing that I can give to them... he's not to a point in his life where he can understand and neither were we... They don't have formed opinions about what life is or what those things mean. For people to push religion on children... it's wrong (personal communication, 2019).

Since the stories of our lives prove the hardships we have faced as Jehovah's Witnesses, it is challenging to desire that children be placed within those same bounds. Perhaps religion can provide a moral structure to help children face aspects of their life. But, maybe giving children the liberty to choose what makes sense and giving them the time to reach that conclusion when they are ready, is more powerful than anything.

Where to Go from Here

As a religious institution, there are power dynamics that must be acknowledged. There is a system that controls people, whether that's voluntary or involuntary. As the world changes, these aspects of the institution stay seemingly static. Morgan shares her view:

It's a lot of the same ideas, but everybody puts their own spin on it and it's man-made... from one core belief but then everyone having their own spin on it so I think that in a way that everybody's right and but then again, everybody is wrong because they persecute and deny people and hate other people in specific religions, which I think is wrong (personal communication, 2019).

Religion has the power, due to faith that people put in it, to alter their view of the world around them. This power is immensely influential in the rules it sets for its followers. Claire highlights the

roles that she believes accompany her faith:

The bible standards are a husband who loves his wife and a woman who respects her husband. The husband is the head of the household and the woman is secondary. It works perfectly if the woman is loveable and the man is respectable. It is only when women make decisions that they aren't supposed to make and men try to overpower that the balance doesn't work. Men are problem-solvers and have stronger opinions while women are more about feelings and emotions (personal communication, 2019).

In this way, biological ideas of sex and gender work with religion to reinforce societal norms of what people "should be." While men solely have to "be respectable," women must not push too far, ask too much, or make too many decisions. Perhaps then, she may be deemed lovable, and therefore worthy within the eyes of the religion. Women continue to push back against these harmful narratives. As we keep fighting for the rights we deserve, will a change in religious views follow?

Can We Believe, Can We Be Free?

After the rich data that I received from my family, I circle back to my question; What is the possibility of religion, and is there freedom for women in faith? I

argue that there is not freedom within Jehovah's Witness Religion but there is possibility. With the current ideals placing shackles on women that lie under the institutional hierarchy, freedom and equity are hard, if not impossible to achieve. However, is this a dynamic that can be altered as our society shifts its messages about women? Claire says:

Change is inevitable and you have to change along with it. It's possible to apply old principles in new ways, it just takes some getting used to. Jesus would understand feminism, he would agree. It's a good thing, the value in life and women not wanting to be put down." I can only hope that religion does indeed change to include women at the forefront of discussion and allow for difference as our society continues to move forward. If Jesus was a feminist, would he agree with the old ways of thinking, or would his "high regard for women" push him to change how religion treats them? (personal communication, 2019)

Rae stepped outside of the religion, finding contentment. In her adulthood, she still believes much she was taught in her upbringing, remembering her experiences, yet not letting them deter her.

I still believe some of [pause] a lot of things that they taught [pause] but I can't bring my [pause] it's the human part of religion. Like organized man-made

structures that I can't bring myself to go and have any faith in it (personal communication, 2019).

Rae spoke about being comfortable with who she is in her identity as a woman and a mother within her religious journey. She expressed that although her experience as a woman within this religion posed many challenges that her boy-gendered peers did not face, she does not reject the moral teachings from her past. Instead of rejecting everything, she solely rejects the institution. Morgan found freedom in identifying with a differing religion altogether:

Paganism isn't defining by action, limiting and telling this is how you need to be...its worshipping the earth and what is around you... what sustains you. I believe in the earth... the things that are here and being thankful for those and knowing there is a bigger picture to life outside of ourselves as human beings... there's freedom in it (Morgan, personal communication, 2019).

Within my own pursuit, I have rejected the institution of Jehovah's Witness religion in its entirety. The label that I place upon myself is "spiritual." I still find myself believing in the power of the universe beyond our human understanding. I do accept some of what I learned within this religion as my own

truth, but I refuse to succumb to limitations based on my identity.

Conclusion

So, is there freedom for women in religion? The answer lies within ourselves. It is up to us to take what has been passed down to us and push the boundaries. We must ask questions, demand answers, and find our own truth. There are clear limitations placed on women with the institution of religion. The accounts of our stories

show you that our experiences prove that to be true. I refuse to let my relationship to the world, to myself, and to my spirituality be restricted. I refuse to settle for aspects that make me subordinate. I have the power to pick and choose my values, to be proud of my identities, and to find acceptance in that. Look within yourself, choose what lets you be human, what makes sense to you, and what liberates you. Religion belongs to all of us.

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Missing from Research: Exposing the Deficit in Knowledge and Research of Endometriosis and Women's Health

“Self-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can supply the courage to fight for it.”

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949)

I remember placing my foot outside of the shower and immediately collapsing to the tile of my bathroom floor. I remember lying there, curling my body into a fetal position, bringing my knees to my chest to stop or relieve any amount of the pain that I was experiencing. I remember screaming, as much as I could, for my family members who were outside enjoying the muggy summer day. I remember when someone was finally able to hear me, my mother rushing into the bathroom and panicking to call an ambulance. I remember her frantically attempting to clothe my suffering body before the ambulance arrived. I remember the paramedics arriving and having to carry me down a set of stairs into the ambulance that was waiting for me. I remember every rut in the road that we hit on the way to the hospital as I felt it all in my body. I remember the IV, the

morphine I was given, the sonogram, the CT scan, and so on, but most of all, I remember all the hours that I have writhed in pain in emergency rooms.

This is one, just one, of my experiences living with Endometriosis and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. This was not the start of my symptoms or when I realized that something was seriously wrong with my body, but the start to truly beginning to advocate for myself and my body. Prior to and following this experience, I endured many of the severe and unpleasant symptoms of these chronic pain disorders, commuting to the emergency room laid in the back of an ambulance or the back seat of my mother's SUV, countless times. I do not want to say that I had become accustomed to the symptoms and the constant trips to the doctors or emergency room, but it all had developed into an unfortunate routine.

Painful Teen Years

I was greeted by the lovely presence of Mother Nature when I was about 13 years old. Immediately, the whole thing was agonizing. I experienced the cramps that were disruptive to my everyday life, the intense back pain, the flux of having clear skin, the imbalance in being able to regulate my mood and emotions, the bloating, the fatigue, and so much more.

But little did I know, during my naïve middle school and high school years, that my wellbeing and health was about to diminish even more. I began to experience intense, sharp, and streaking pain in my lower abdomen, more consistently on my right side. This was the start to fluid-filled sacs and cysts growing on my ovaries and rupturing quite often.

I was very active in high school, at least to the best of my ability, considering my health. I was a competitive dancer, taught dance to younger students, had roles in musicals, and loved spending time with my family and friends. This all began to change the more I experienced excruciating and debilitating abdominal pain. Suddenly, I was told that I needed to stop dancing, stop teaching, not accept that role in the musical, and let my body rest as much as possible. All of these sacrifices were due to the size of cysts that had been continuously growing on my ovaries and the fear that my then level of activity could cause ovarian torsion. It was explained that cysts sometimes just grew like this, and that it would be something that I would maybe have to occasionally deal with. Occasionally turned into frequent, and I continued to go to the ER many times a year.

It was frustrating to visit the emergency room so much, however the most frustrating aspect to the visit was the care I received. It took me years of visits, years of cysts rupturing and having internal bleeding for an emergency nurse to suggest that I might have polycystic ovary syndrome. It always seemed to my mom and I that doctors never fully understood how to care for me when I did go to the hospital. One gynecologist visit after a trip to the hospital, I told my doctor that an ER nurse thought I might have polycystic ovary syndrome. My doctor looked at me and told me that it is very possible, but to be diagnosed, I have to fit a certain criteria. I ended up fitting the criteria and finally got an explanation for what had been causing me years of pain. But with this explanation, I didn't receive a magical solution, as there was not and still isn't one. My life became managing the daily pain and hormonal imbalances that I was experiencing. Not only was this already extremely difficult to deal with as a teenager, it got even worse from there.

Will College Really be the Best Years of my Life?

I decided to go away to college after I graduated from high school. This was when I started to encounter higher levels of pain than I had been feeling before.

The cramping pain in my abdomen and back matured into feeling like I was constantly being kicked in both areas. Extreme bloating made me look as if I was expecting a child. I was experiencing all-around chronic fatigue and very excessive bleeding, clearly suffering every day. My management plan included being on birth control, taking pain medications, and wrapping my back and abdomen in heating pads. I have changed birth control over ten times between the time my issues began and now. The trips to emergency rooms continued and so did the dismissive and shaming responses from nurses and doctors. I would essentially be told there was nothing they could do for me after they concluded it was not my appendix rupturing, but just my ovaries. Just my ovaries.

Between doctor's visits and trips to the hospital, I was trying to live the life of a college student. I was trying to attend my classes, engage in extracurricular activities, work in my Resident Assistant position that I was very lucky to have, and interact with my friends and boyfriend. Balancing my college student life and my distressed body was incredibly challenging. The pain and not knowing exactly what was wrong with me took a toll on my physical, mental, and emotional health -- really, every

aspect of my life. More and more, I struggled to get out of bed to attend my classes because of my physical and emotional troubles. Sometimes it became exhausting for me to interact with my residents and do simple tasks that were required within my position. My boyfriend unintentionally became my caretaker. He became the person who transported me to the emergency room, with my family being home, helped me deal with the after-effects of being dismissed and sometimes shamed at hospitals. Overall, he was my loving and caring source of stability and support throughout the whole experience.

One weekend at home, I was experiencing the most painful episode of cramping, bloating, and bleeding that I had ever experienced. This was followed with a very angry phone call by my mom to my OBGYN inquiring what were they finally going to do to help me. It was a Saturday. I was told to wait until Monday and come into the office. I spent the next day or so waiting, not able to move from my bed unless I absolutely had to use the bathroom. This doctor's visit contained the typical "Tell me what you're feeling" conversation, and I was greeted with two options. I could either have an explorative surgery, which is the only way to formally diagnose what they

thought was endometriosis, or I could be put in a 6-month temporary menopause, with all the side effects, to attempt to alleviate some level of the pain and problems. I chose surgery.

I scheduled my surgery for the first possible date. This date fell the Friday before midterm week. I expected to need at least one week of recovery, so I knew that I would be missing all of my tests and studying opportunities. I did not care. I cared, but I recognized that I needed to put an end to the miserable experience that I was encountering. So I, alongside my support system boyfriend, packed my bags to go home and get my surgery when it was time. I remember the overwhelming anxiety I had prior to surgery. I was thinking about what my doctor may find and remove, what if she doesn't find anything, what if it's extremely extensive, etc.

I woke up after my surgery, hysterically crying in the recovery room. I very briefly remember repeating, "I'm scared," over and over again to the nurse and her insisting that I needed to go back to sleep. I remember waking up again feeling nauseous. And then again, in a lot of pain. And then, lastly, waking up in a chair and seeing my family and boyfriend staring at me. My mom helped me eat the graham crackers and juice that I had insisted on not having. She told me my

doctor and surgeon said that the surgery went well, and they did find endometriosis lesions on some of my organs. I experienced a sense of relief, but also intense uneasiness. I finally got a diagnosis, but did I really want that diagnosis?

For the next week, I was basically couch bound. I needed assistance getting up and back down carefully, trying not to rip the stitches in my belly button and in two spots on each side of my abdomen. I followed up with my doctor a few days later and got a surprise that I was not expecting. I got pictures of my organs. My doctor circled and pointed out each place that she had found endometriosis invading my body. She said, “You can even make these pictures your Facebook profile picture if you want!”

This is a very condensed version of my experiences with symptoms, getting misdiagnosed, getting diagnosed, and living with endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome. I am one in ten women who exist with this quality of life due to the lack of knowledge and research surrounding women's health, but specifically, gynecological health.

What is Endometriosis?

Endometriosis, a chronic and painful gynecological disorder, is defined by the

presence of endometrial-like tissue covering the outside of the uterus and surrounding organs, in turn impacting female bodies in physical, mental, emotional, and social ways (Luciano & Luciano, 2006, p. 617). Endometriosis is not a rare disease, but harms approximately 10 percent of reproductive age females in extraordinarily negative ways due to symptoms, experiences of diagnosis delay, experiences with health care providers, a blatant lack of information, and the impacts it has on physical, psychological, and social realms of life (Gerlinger, Faustmann, Hassall, & Seitz, 2012).

There are many unfortunate and weakening symptoms indicating the presence of endometriosis. Endometriosis is commonly marked by various pains, painful sexual intercourse, heavy/irregular bleeding, and issues of fertility. Pain associated with endometriosis is described as “sharp, stabbing, horrendous, tearing, debilitating, and breath catching” (Moradi, Parker, Sneddon, Lopez, & Ellwood, 2014, p. 4). These descriptions of pain can occur in different areas such as one's abdomen, bowel, bladder, lower back, and lower body. Endometriosis related pain impacts female bodies in different frequencies fluctuating

between every day, weekly, or a year to years marked with pain (Moradi et al., 2014, p. 4). Severe and progressive pain during menstrual and non-menstrual phases tied with other symptoms of fatigue, bloating, bladder urgency and symptoms, bowel symptoms, and sleep disturbance essentially epitomizes endometriosis.

Physical pain typically brands endometriosis, but most experience a psychological impact as well with feelings of low self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of powerlessness (Moradi et al., 2014). Women with endometriosis often carry varying anxieties, some regarding future fertility, “recurrence of the disease, disease prognosis, worsening symptoms, interference in their education, employment, sexual/marital life and motherhood responsibilities, financial concern because of losing their job and high treatment costs, finding a new partner” (Moradi et al., 2014, p. 7). Endometriosis’ disruption of the social realm of life is typically the cause for many of these anxieties that are not as much of a concern for health care providers as the physical aspects of the disease (Riazi, Tehranian, Ziaei, Mohammadi, Hajizadeh, & Montazeri, 2014).

Though these symptoms, both physical and psychological, are often excruciating and very frequent, there is trouble in connecting them to a diagnosis of endometriosis. A woman’s experience getting diagnosed with endometriosis varies and is often marked with unpleasantness. This unpleasantness typically includes a delay in diagnosis, misdiagnosis, dismissive attitudes from doctors and others, ineffective treatment options, and an overall lack of knowledge and research surrounding endometriosis.

Delay between first experience of symptoms and diagnosis is typically many years, with an average of 8.1 years before diagnosis (Moradi et al., 2014, p. 3). During this time, those reporting symptoms are undergoing varying tests, often misdiagnosed and mistreated. Some misdiagnoses include “appendicitis, ovarian cyst, ectopic pregnancy, pelvic inflammatory disease, and ovarian cancer” (Moradi et al., 2014, p. 4). While being poked and prodded, these patients are interacting with health care providers who do not seem to listen to their concerns or dismiss their symptoms as normal or not pervasive enough to act on. Those impacted by endometriosis have reported both positive and negative experiences with health care providers. Most striking are

the negative experiences of providers not listening to their concerns, not having time to answer their questions, and dismissing their symptoms (Moradi et al., 2014, Results section, para. 6).

Another large issue of receiving an endometriosis diagnosis is the necessity for laparoscopic surgery. Laparoscopic surgery allows the surgeon to see the degree to which the disease has invaded organs. A laparoscopic excision sometimes provides relief for those who endure it, but “is not always an ultimate cure for patients as recurrence rates after the operation can be as high as 40-50% after approximately two years” (Simsa, Mihalyi, Kyama, Mwenda, Fulop, & D’Hooghe, 2007, p. 649). Laparoscopic surgery is necessary to receive a diagnosis. However, it is “expensive and puts an extra burden on both the operation room and the patient” (Simsa et al., 2007, p. 649) and can be replaced with further knowledge and research.

Stemming from the lack of knowledge and research of endometriosis comes a lack of treatment options. Currently there is no cure for endometriosis. Medical professionals seek to manage symptomatic endometriosis by attempting to relieve symptoms and prevent recurrence and progression (Luciano & Luciano, 2006). Because endometriosis is chronic and predicted

to reoccur, repetitive cycles of medical and surgical therapy are necessary unless one elects to remove their ovaries and uterus, which doesn’t specifically promise relief of symptoms (Luciano & Luciano, 2006). Initial medical therapy for symptomatic endometriosis includes hormonal contraceptives with estrogen and progestin (Luciano & Luciano, 2006). Alternative therapies and changes of lifestyle are often recommended, such as change in sleep, exercise, and dietary habits.

In the United States, endometriosis and its extensions cost society an estimated \$70 billion dollars in 2009 (Brüggmann, Elizabeth-Martinez, Klingelhofer, Quarcoo, Jaque, & Groneberg, 2016, p.1). Endometriosis poses a threat to female health globally, just as in the United States. In a multitude of countries, there is a large disparity in research even though millions of female bodies are impacted. In their research, Hickey, Ballard, and Farquhar (2014) note a European study of 1,000 women indicating the average annual cost of endometriosis, per woman, was \$1,380, with two thirds of the cost from loss of productivity (p.1). In low resource countries, disparities of knowledge and research are even greater. In a data analysis of endometriosis related publications between the years

1990 and 2009, 11,056 publications were identified across 88 nations (Brüggman et al., 2016, p.3). The United States lead with 3,705 publications, followed by the United Kingdom (Brüggman et al., 2016, p.3). Brüggman et al. state that taking “a closer look into the global research exemplifies that a large gap of research activity exists in a multitude of countries in which -- under conservative estimations -- tens of millions of affected women live” (p. 9). With this known, research efforts not only need to be increased, but also expanded towards disease prevention rather than disease management.

Recognizing the Inadequacy

Many issues and groups of health problems need to be addressed. One that is specifically, and could be considered intentionally, excluded is the absence of scientific knowledge and research in women’s health. There are many reasons for the lack of research, knowledge, and care surrounding women's health. Auerbach and Figert (1995) point out a few basic issues as to why the current field of medicine is lacking research, knowledge, and care for women's health. These are, “... the lack of inclusion of women in major clinical studies, inadequate attention to gender differences and gender analysis in

medical research, and inadequate attention to diseases and conditions specific to, more prevalent among, or more serious in women” (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 118). There are other factors, beginning at defining women’s health and who it is doing that.

A Sex Missing from Research

Medical knowledge is typically derived from and created by men. It is then enforced on women, carrying the notion that the results can be functional for both sexes, even though there are stark differences in health risks between the sexes (Auerbach & Figert, 1995). This difference is exposed in morbidity and mortality rates, treatment options and outcomes among men and women (Auerbach & Figert, 1995). Research studies need to include both men and women in order to comprehensively grasp those specifically at risk for specific diseases or conditions.

In 1986, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) issued a policy encouraging the inclusion of women in clinical scientific trials, due to the prior lack of women admittance. This policy issue came from the Public Health Service Task Force on Women's Health Issues’ publication addressing the “lack of scientific data on women's health as a barrier to understanding women’s

physical, mental and social health care needs” (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 117). The report emphasized the general lack of research regarding women's health and, particularly, health issues surrounding the menstrual cycle. In 1990, it was found that the NIH was not adhering to its own policies, and there was no formal way of monitoring the policy. Large NIH research studies blatantly “involved no female subjects”; the report questioned whether research findings “could legitimately be applied to women” (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 118). These studies included the effects of aspirin on reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, a study of coronary heart disease, and longitudinal studies of aging. It was found that, “among studies of non-gender specific diseases, women were underrepresented (either excluded from or less than one-third of subjects) in nearly three times as many studies as were men” (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 118). Clinical studies, both past and some present, have specifically excluded women from studies. This causes underrepresentation in medical knowledge, resulting in unfavorable care for women who need it.

There are many supposed reasons why women are excluded from research studies. For example, biological

variabilities, such as the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause, could alter a study in the researcher's eyes (Auerbach & Figert, 1995). There is also a fear of an increase in the cost of research if one chooses to use women as subjects. Another reason for this exclusion is the budget restraints that have required focus on “high risk” populations, “such as... white men with heart disease” (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 119). Most of all, there is a general acceptance and belief that the differences between sexes is not compelling enough to cause a researcher to not only research women, but also medically treat them different from men. There is one recognized difference between sexes: the female body's reproductive abilities and hormonal cycles. This recognition is used as a rationale for exclusion, and stamps female bodies with only the importance of reproduction. This is extremely counterproductive and continues the ideal of those in patriarchal control defining what should be important about female bodies.

Defining Women's Health

Women are often not included in the identification of what encompasses women's health, and the field is typically defined by others. The authors of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* declare:

Policy Makers, usually male, have designed the system primarily for the convenience and financial gain of physicians, hospitals, administrators, and the medical industries. We believe that women, as the majority of consumers and workers, paid and unpaid, should have the major voice in the health and medical care policy-making in this country (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1998, p. 653).

Not only are women not included in the declaration of what women's health is, but many factors of women's lives such as the "sociocultural matrix in which women's ills develop, including in the context of poverty, patriarchy, and other life stresses" are not being considered when creating an agenda of women's health priorities (Inhorn, 2006, p. 349). Temmerman (2015) argues that it is critical to place "the human rights and health of women and adolescent girls, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights" (p. 3) at the center of mending the gaps within the past women's health agendas that have been made. Endometriosis, being extremely relevant to reproductive health, desperately needs to be included in the agenda of women's health priorities as it impacts all realms of life for those who are diagnosed.

Tuana (2006) discusses a "Speculum of Ignorance" within the women's

health movement, and speaks of feminist health activists and their goals of being

"committed to uncovering the ways women's bodies had been ignored, to examining knowledge that had been withheld from women and certain groups of men, to reclaiming knowledge's that had been denied or suppressed, and to developing new knowledge freed from the confines of traditional frameworks" (2006, p. 2).

There is importance in recognizing that ignorance exists within those who control the medical community and those who advocate for women's health. Even more important is the recognition of why such ignorance exists. In "They Do Not Want Us to Know" (2006), Tuana states it is key to "remove the veil of ignorance around topics where our ignorance has been systemically cultivated" (p. 10). Such ignorance has been created by the current systems and social standards society has placed value upon. By "remove the veil" (p. 10), I argue that a feminist approach to health care is necessary.

Feminist Approach to Health Care

Integrating a feminist approach and critique to current standards of medicine is crucial to making a fundamental and long-standing reconstruction of

women's health care. *The Boston Women's Health Book Collective* (1998) states that the feminist approach to health care should be "focused on wellness and health rather than disease and treatment" (p. 653). Reasoning for this derives from the thought that "health [as in ideal] does not generate as much profit as illness" (Cavalcanti de Aguiar, 1998, p. 27). When there is a focus on illness, the healthcare industry can sometimes specifically be focused on rare conditions. This is what Cavalcanti de Aguiar (1998) considers "a waste of time and energy" (p. 29). Endometriosis is a disease known to have considerable prevalence within communities, and it is by no means a rare condition. By shifting the focus to health and prevention, endometriosis could be included within a new women's health care agenda and would be granted the opportunity to increase knowledge surrounding the disease.

A feminist approach to health care means the inclusion of gender, feminism, and women's studies in medical education. Such a modification would provide those who are entering the medical field to become more conscious of gender, race, class, power systems, social constructions of identity, politics, intersectionality, and how they all cohere to health care, and patients.

Cavalcanti de Aguiar (1998) states that working with an interdisciplinary approach would "enhance the awareness about the risks that affect women and other 'minorities,' as well as prepare professionals to develop a meaningful dialogue with the clients, starting from the clients' previous knowledge and beliefs" (p. 33).

At the heart of some doctors' ideological perspectives are misogyny and sexism in professional training and health care (Cavalcanti de Aguiar, 1998, p. 10). This is often magnified throughout their professional training and extended into their practice. These ideologies often include assumptions about women's identities, bodies, sexualities, and social roles. Auerbach and Figert (1995) note that exploring gender within the medical field was not a focus until there was a shift in coverage. When this shift in focus began, it was found, in Western society, that men die at an earlier age, but women experience more sickness and illnesses, thus filling women's lives with chronic disease and misfortune (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 121). Including gender within the medical field creates recognition specifically towards health concerns that are unique to women, or that disproportionately affect women. (Auerbach & Figert, 1995, p. 122).

Endometriosis, being specific to female bodies, would benefit from a health care system that explores how gender is intertwined not only within medical care, but in all realms of life.

To start modifying current practices, it is important for those who are entering the field, and those within the field, to understand that women's health and illness is not only biologically determined, but socially as well. Medical curriculum does not include social factors of illnesses, but specifically scientific or biological approaches (Cavalcanti de Aguiar, 1998). By ignoring these social factors, medical professionals are ignoring the fact that "inequalities of gender, race and class lead to poor health" (Cavalcanti de Aguiar, 1998, p. 36) and lessens of the possibility of empowering not just patients, but people in general. Exploring these forms of oppression as intersectionality is key to understanding that there are more health consequences

to particular groups of people, such as poor, women of color.

The Future of Women's Health

Mending the discrepancies in women's health entails interdisciplinary thought and endeavors. These endeavors need to include women in research, women's voices, and always carry the thought of intersectionality and oppression, thus encapsulating a feminist approach to the field of health.

Endometriosis, one of the many reproductive health related diseases that specifically impact female bodies, could be either less prevalent, or less excruciating in a society that integrates a feminist approach to health care. As one of the many women impacted by the disease, I could be living a less painful and distressing life. I would not be the one in the "one of ten women" who exist with an inferior quality of life due to the lack of knowledge and research surrounding women's health.

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The Comfort Women's Activism through the Arts

“Art was used as a gateway to explore the past, the present, and the future
of the comfort women activism”

(Yae-Jin Ha, “Comfort Women Wanted”, 2014, p. 12)

This essay explores how "comfort women", used as sexual slaves, turned to art to showcase the deep emotional scars they suffered. The comfort women use different forms of artistic expressions to start the healing process within their lives. Before I talk about the artwork, I will refer to how the comfort women manifested to become one of history's inequalities of human rights and torture.

“Comfort Women”

During World War II, the Japanese Government and Japanese soldiers organized brothels stations for soldiers to sexually abuse women who were called the "comfort women." According to Soh (1996),

Coerced sexual labor, that is, sexual slavery, was inflicted primarily upon lower class young females of colonial Korea by imperial Japan during the Pacific War, but Japanese women and women of other occupied territories such as Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, and Thailand were also used as “comfort women” (p.1226).

The Japanese government and its soldiers dismissed these women's human rights and voices. Park, Lee, Hand, Anderson, and Schlewiler (2016) said, "Once in the 'comfort stations', these girls and young women were regarded as military supplies and were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused ... They were repeatedly raped, in some cases 20 - 30 times per day" (p.333). The suffering and the abuse these women lived through touches on the subject of trauma, which can cause mental and physical health issues. Some of the disorders experienced include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicide, as well as depression. Yoko (2000) referred to one comfort woman who said, "I refuse to be called a comfort woman. Although the word suggests something related to affection or warmth, in reality, 'comfort women' were subjected to the systematic rape of the Japanese state as well as its armed forces" (p.54). This woman's comment illustrates the emotional scars comfort women carry for the rest of their lives.

My Own Voice Suppressed

I have my own story to share about a sexual assault when I was only twelve years old. I can remember going with my mother and sister to Rome, New York, to visit my Aunt Mary and Uncle Guy

during our summer vacation. We loved going up to visit them; I remembered Uncle Guy always took me roller skating along with buying lunch for us at the roller-skating rink. My family would always go every summer to my aunt and uncle's house, which was nice because we had friends in Rome that we would play with all the time while we were there. We would have fun playing different games like red light, green light, catching frogs, as well as getting ice cream from the ice cream truck almost every day.

I was a normal twelve-year-old kid on vacation with my family when my whole life changed one early morning. My Uncle Jack is the youngest in my mom's family; my mom is the second youngest. They were very close to each other because of being born a year apart from each other. Uncle Jack came to my Aunt Mary's house to see us all and was happy to see my mom, along with my sister and myself as well. He lived a little ways away from Aunt Mary's home so when Uncle Jack came, he would stay a few days overnight. I wish my uncle had never stayed overnight. I wish he never visited because of that one night when my mom and sister slept on the pullout couch. I had a smaller size mattress to sleep on, which I had to put next to the sofa that my Uncle Jack was going to sleep on

while he was there. I could have moved the mattress closer to my mom and sister instead of being next to my uncle, but my aunt had a lot of living room furniture, so there was not enough room.

I can remember getting ready for bed as my mom told me to; I put on my favorite nightgown that I loved to wear. I wish I never wore that nightgown because instead of wearing that I could have worn my pajama bottoms; it would have been harder for him to put his hands down my pants to assault me as he did. My mom told my sister and I that we could watch television until nine o'clock, and then we had to go to bed. I wish with all my heart and soul that I knew what was going to happen to me in the early morning the next day. I was asleep when I felt something strange. That something was my Uncle Jack assaulting me by touching my private parts. When I opened my eyes, my uncle pulled his hand out of my underwear and turned over fast as if he were sleeping. My first reaction was to jump up off the mattress and run into the bathroom. I noticed that my mom and sister were still sleeping when I got up to get away from my Uncle Jack. When I got in the bathroom, I started to cry, but I made sure that I was quiet. I then wiped my

tears away so no one would see my tears rolling down my face.

I was only twelve-years-old; I thought I was going to get into trouble even though I did not do anything wrong but be a child. I was afraid my mom was going to get mad along with yelling at me. Then I thought she might think I was lying and believe my uncle instead of me. Therefore, I decided to suppress my voice about what had happened. Years later, I started to remember the assault and asked myself why? Why did my Uncle think it was okay for him to assault me sexually like that? Did I do something that made him think I wanted him to touch me like that? He was my favorite Uncle; he would always horse around with my sister and me as well. After he did this to me, I made sure that my sister was not going to be his next victim.

I finally revealed to my mother when I was older what her brother had done to me, along with how I thought it was my fault. My mother, of course, was furious at my Uncle for what he did. He had taken my childhood away from me. My mom was heartbroken that I blamed myself for what happened. She took me into her arms and hugged me, telling me it was never my fault. Even though that made me happy that she believed me, it did not take away the pain that tore

inside me every day as I started to remember what my Uncle did to me. Even so, I was not going to let this change the person I became; I was going to keep being that strong woman. Even today, I look at my reflection in the mirror and I see that innocent twelve-year-old looking back at me, tears running. I know I became a strong woman for that twelve-year-old inside me and that we persevered through that traumatic time in our life.

I understand why comfort women chose to keep their secrets about being sexual slaves, because I suppressed my voice about my own sexual assault. I turned to art when I was a young girl, in order to start my own healing process from within. Many comfort women also used art to express the inequality and the severity of becoming sexual slaves. They persevered by sharing their stories of how the government and its soldiers inflicted inhuman suffering upon them as young girls and women. For that is what happened to these young girls and women who were kidnapped or lied to: their innocence and bodies were stolen repeatedly time and time again with no hopes to escape the torture they lived through day after day.

The Voices that Survived

The women who did survive returned home. Many turned to art to make their voices heard within the communities they call home. Paula Allen from Amnesty International (2015) said:

When South Korea's Kim Hak-Soon testified in August 1991 about her experiences as a sexual slave for the Japanese military, she was the first woman in her country to break over 50 years of silence. When she did so, she opened the door for survivors all over Asia to start speaking up about their own experiences (p.1).

The presence of these art pieces enabled comfort women to move forward and to have a voice. The emotional depth in these artistic images and the stories they tell will keep living on even after these women have passed away.

The title of the image in Figure 1 is, "Stolen Away in a Ship." The artist's name is Soon-Duk Kim. She painted this image in 1995, showing girls and women stolen from their homes on a boat, standing next to soldiers. In this painting, the artist represents the unknown of what is to happen to the young girls and women when they reach land. The soldiers knew they had lied to these women about good paying jobs just so the women would come with

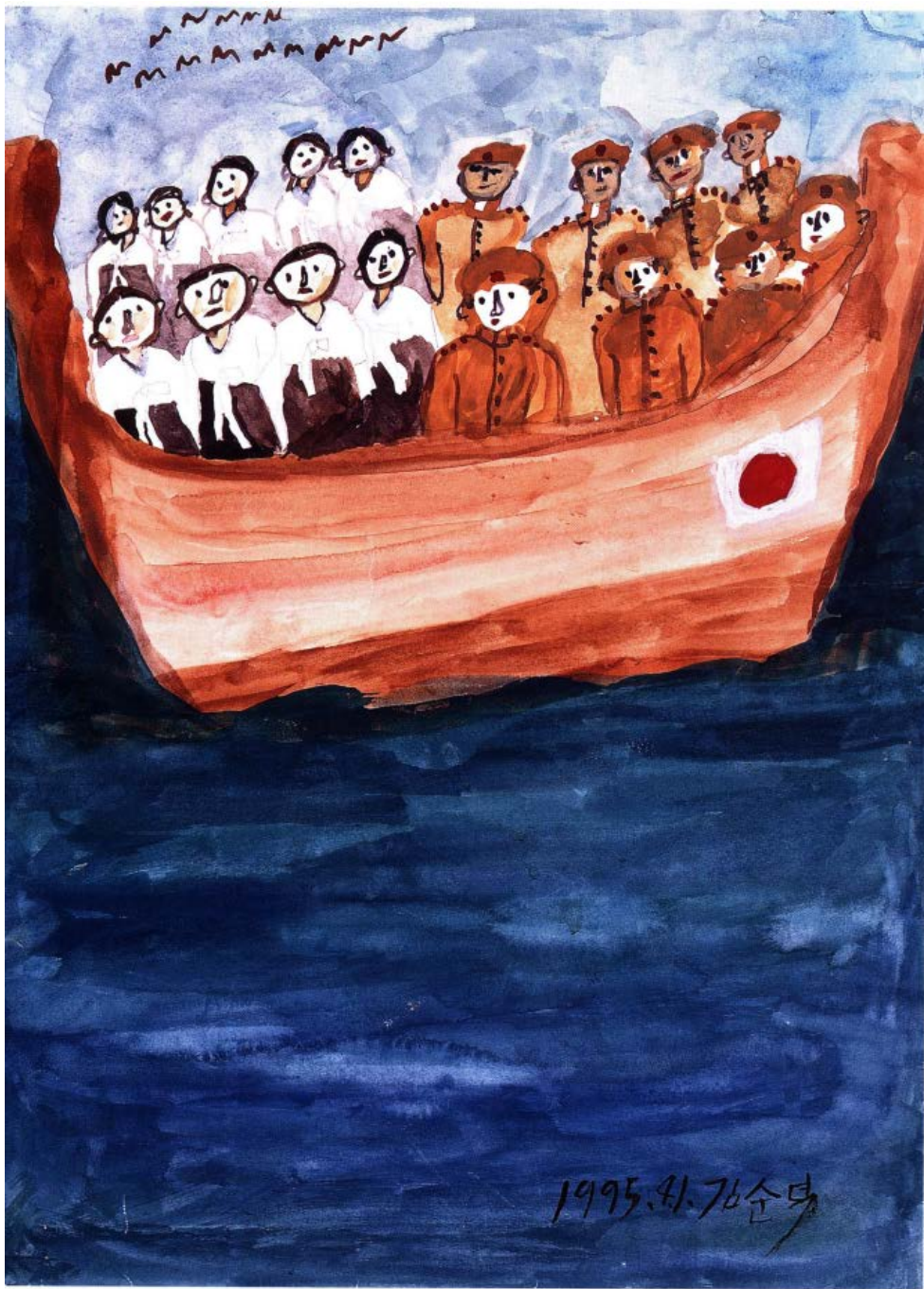


Figure 1. Soon-Duk Kim, "Stolen Away in a Ship", Acrylic on Paper, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.

them. The significance of this picture is the word “stolen,” which reflects on how these women's lives were stolen away from them. They were innocent young girls with their own hopes and dreams ahead of them, such as education and possibly marriage one day. Instead, these young girls were taken away from their families, reflecting the cruelty of these soldiers. One thing that was “stolen” from them was their bodies because the minute that boat hit landfall, their bodies became sexual slaves and

their bodies would never belong to just them.

The title of the painting in Figure 2 is “Nightmare.” The artist’s name is Duk-Kyoung Kang. Kang created this art piece to show how soldiers killed these innocent women by throwing them overboard, so their voices would be suppressed forever (Yang, 1997). It is heartbreaking that the soldiers did not see the qualities of either these women’s lives or the women’s families back home. The other women are watching, not



Figure 2. Duk-Kyoung Kang, “Nightmare”, Acrylic on Paper, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.

knowing if they were going to be next. The soldiers' purpose was to put fear into these women in hopes they would never tell their stories about being forced into sexual slavery as comfort women. The soldiers did not seem to consider that some of these women would someday come forward to report their experience as a comfort woman and how they were used as sexual slaves. (Wonhaeng, 2004).

The painting in Figure 3 is called, "In that Place, at that Moment in Time." The artist's name is Soon-Duk Kim. Kim's painting reflects the emotional pain that comfort women endured night after night as they were sexually assaulted 20 to 30 times each night (Yang, 1997). Comfort women suffered abuse and emotional instability. The soldiers equated them to military supplies. This is why the soldiers referred to them as "comfort women", shunning their identities as if they were not human beings. The three soldiers in Kim's painting are looking down at a woman, not seeing the emotional state she is in, but only desiring to sexually abuse this woman again and again for their own comfort.

The painting in Figure 4, titled "Unblossomed Flower", was created by Soon-Duk Kim in 1995. This image features a comfort woman holding an

unblossomed cherry tree. The unblossomed tree pertains to the lack of growth that she felt internally as a woman. Comfort women's minds, hearts, and souls, along with their bodies, became dead inside like the unblossomed tree she is holding. This is not the life that these women ever imagined for themselves. Being forced into sexual slavery by the soldiers dishonored this woman along with all the other women as well.

Figure 5, "Comfort Station in Labaul" was created by Duk-Kyoung Kang in 1995. This artwork shows a comfort station where a comfort woman suffered incarceration for six years. The woman is sitting outside while the soldiers are watching her from a tower that looks over the brothel station. These soldiers as well as the Japanese government disregarded this woman's rights. This woman showed courage for sacrificing herself by standing up for her rights and the equality for the other women as well. This picture reflects on how strong these women had to be while living through the enslavement of being somebody's sexual pleasures and nothing more. (Yang, 1997)

The title of the painting in Figure 6 is "Innocence Stolen." Duk-Kyoung Kang created this piece to reflect the innocence stolen from a comfort woman

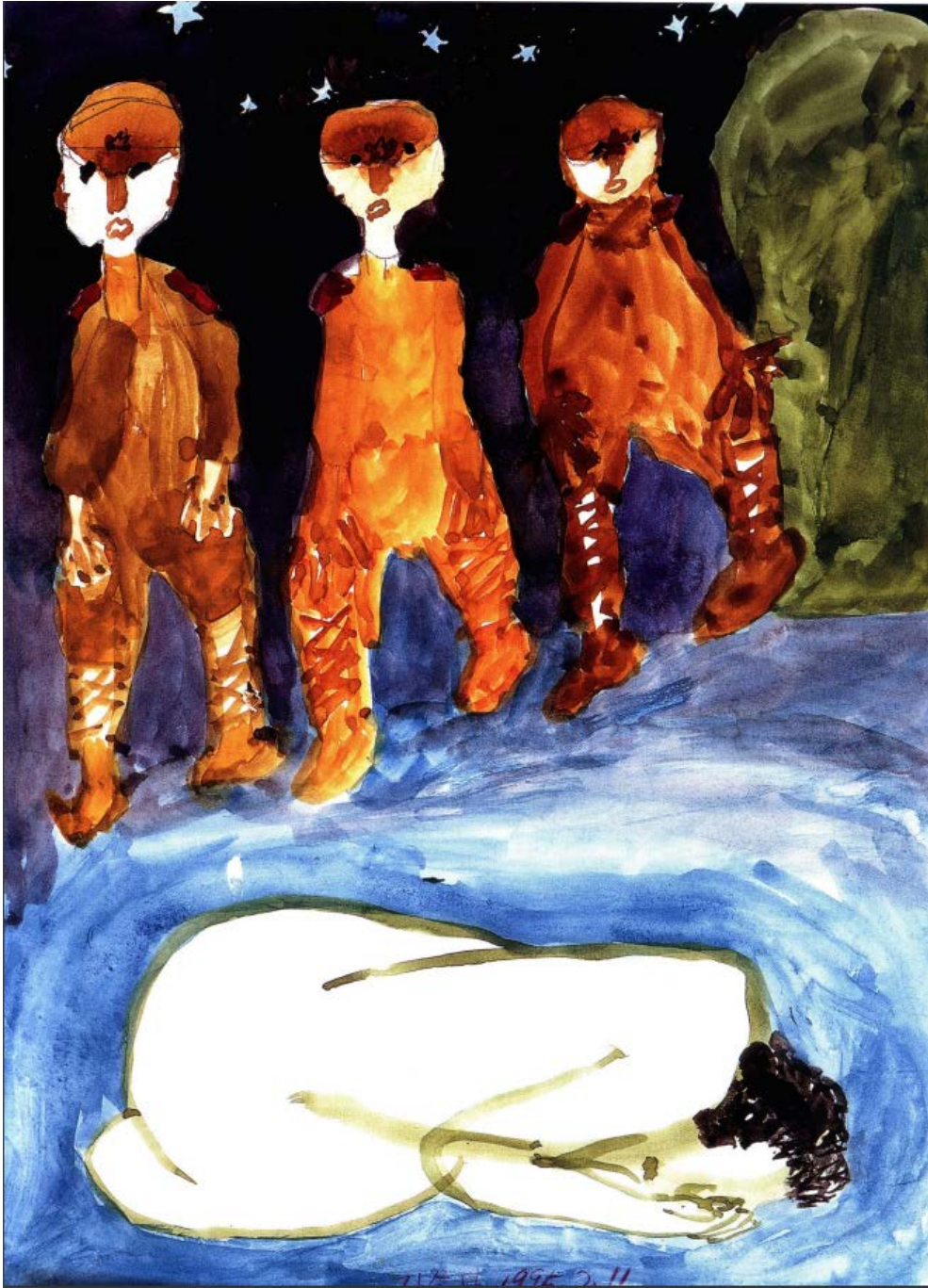


Figure 3. Soon-Duk Kim, “In That Place, at That Moment in Time”, Acrylic on Paper, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 4. Soon-Duk Kim, “Unblossomed Flower”, Acrylic on Embroidered Silk, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.

when she was sexually abused by a soldier. Cherry Blossom leaves are falling from the tree, around both the woman and the soldier. The soldier's body is the tree and its roots, showing dominance and enslavement over the woman. This painting suggests girls' and women's lives cut short, having no power over who they were as individuals as well as their bodies. Cantu (2017) said, "The cherry blossom represents the fragility and the beauty of life ... It's a

reminder that life is almost overwhelmingly beautiful but that it is also tragically short" (p. 1). This statement reflects feminist theory. Women are viewed as beautiful fragile human beings easily broken -- a woman's life can be cut short. Kang portrays this in her artwork, along with showing the skeletons of the other women who lost their lives and voices from either being thrown overboard or



Figure 5. Duk-Kyoung Kang, "Comfort Station in Labaul", Acrylic on Paper, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 6. Duk-Kyoung Kang, “Innocence stolen”, Acrylic on Canvas, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.

getting sexually transmitted diseases from being forced to have sex with multiple soldiers every night. This is the life that these women lived every day without knowing if they would ever survive to tell the real truth of how they became comfort women during World War II.

Duk-Kyoung Kang's "Punish the Guilty! – For the Sake of Peace" (Figure 7) shows the emperor tied to a dead cherry blossom tree with his eyes covered. White doves, representing purity, fly around him to indicate "the emperor must take sole responsibility for peace" (Wonhaeng, 2004, "Dialogue for the preparation of collected Paintings book"). The artist used red as the color of the background to reflect the women's innocence and the blood shed when they lost their virginity. Three women are holding guns pointing at the emperor. The tables have now turned; the emperor is the one tied up and blinded. This is what the soldiers did to these women every day, holding comfort women captive against their will.

"Punish the Guilty!" reflects on the torture that these women lived through day after day as comfort women. Kang, along with other women, felt dead inside every day that they were sexual slaves. Their voices never mattered to these Japanese soldiers.

"Liberation" (Figure 8) is created by Soon-Duk Kim. In this artwork, comfort women are holding flags from the many places they called home. The artist is reflecting on the end of sexual slavery. Imprisonment, along with their oppressed voices, is no longer. "Liberation" is the true meaning of the word "feminism," when these women did not have to be subservient to the Japanese soldiers or the Japanese government any longer. On this important day of liberation, people still have to remember everything these women lived through by the hands of these soldiers. When the comfort women came home, the people within their own communities as well as some of their families shunned them. The comfort women were blamed for something that was never their fault.

Even after their liberation, voices of the comfort women continued to be oppressed for over fifty years, until Soon-Duk Kim finally shared her story about what happened to her as a comfort woman. Other women then stepped up and shared their own stories for the whole world to hear. That is when their true liberation happened. This was also when the Japanese government and soldiers were held responsible for the inequality they made these girls and women suffer for so many years.



Figure 7. Duk-Kyoung Kang, "Punish the Guilty! — For the Sake of Peace, Acrylic on Canvas, 1995. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 8. Soon-Duk Kim, “Liberation”, Acrylic on Paper, 1994. From *The Painting Edition of Japanese Military Sexual Slaves*, 2004, Gwangju-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea: The House of Sharing (Nanumi Jip) / The Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. Reprinted with permission.

The drawing featured in Figure 9 is titled “My Innocence.” I created this piece in 2019. In this artwork, you see a young girl who was sexually assaulted by her uncle. This young girl suppressed her voice until she started remembering what this man had done to her so many years ago. I don’t even associate with

that side of the family any longer. I see this man today as a coward who did not think about the pain and the suffering that I have gone through throughout the years. Today I am a strong woman who stands up for herself. I share my sexual assault story so it can help someone else share their story as well.



Figure 4. Karapinar. “My Innocence” (2019)

In conclusion, comfort women suffered through horrendous pain within their young lives and still found the courage to share their artwork with the world. After my sexual assault, I found comfort in creating an art piece that reflects my own feelings of what happened to me. My mom was my rock after I told her what her brother did to me. The comfort women were each other's rock by coming together and

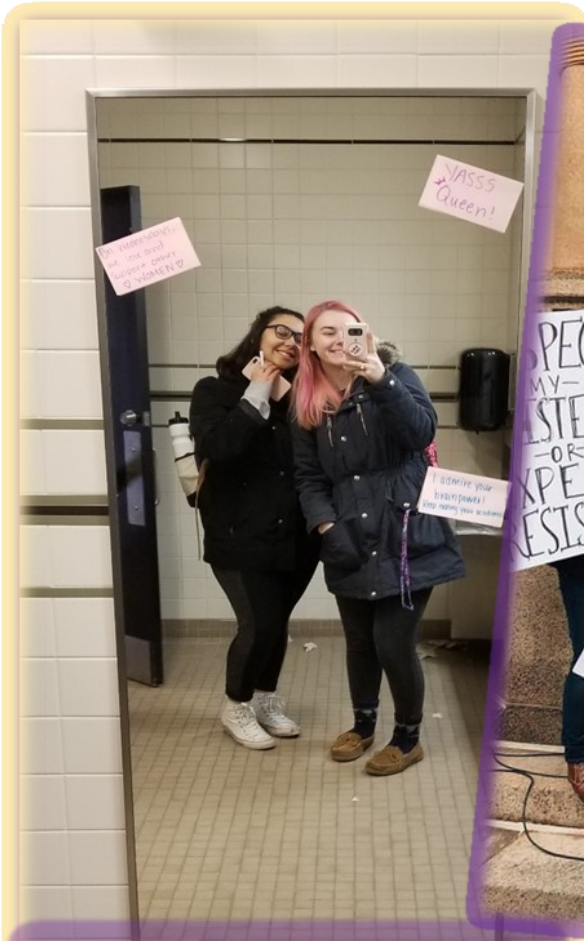
letting their voices be heard, by coming forward and sharing their stories verbally and pictorially. When they came forward, their own healing process began. Sadly, there are not too many comfort women left today, but their voices will never be silenced, because through their art pieces, they have shared their history. They refused to keep their voices suppressed any longer.

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